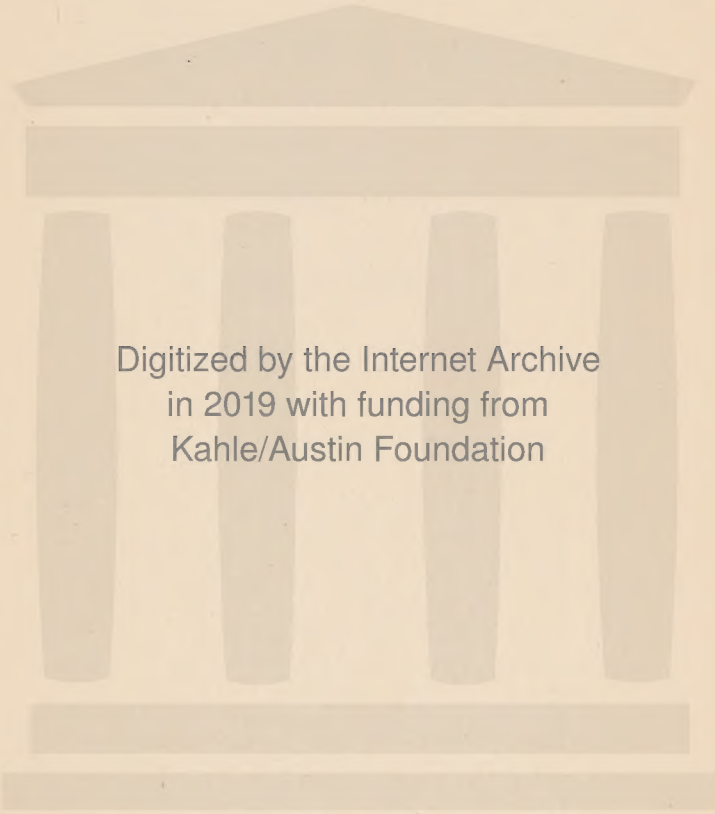




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FROM DOUBLE EAGLE
TO RED FLAG



VOLUME TWO

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE TO RED FLAG

By
GENERAL P. N. KRASSNOFF

*Translated from the Second Russian
Edition by Erik Law-Gisiko*

With an Introduction by
WILLIAM GERHARDI



VOLUME TWO

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PART FOUR

I

TOWARD the end of November, 1914, the Nth Cavalry Division in which was included Karpoff's regiment of Don Cossacks was encamped on the Russian side of the river Nida. It had been covering the retreating infantry hard pressed by the Austrian armies in Eastern Galicia. The enemy's advance having suddenly ceased, an infantry force under an energetic officer, Col. Dorman, had under cover of artillery re-crossed the river and begun a counter-attack. The cavalry was being held in readiness for the pursuit if the attack succeeded, but was at some distance from the point of engagement.

As soon as the first artillery shot had fallen from the Russian side and the fire had increased to a formidable cannonade Colonel Dorman, who sat in his small dug-out beyond the bridge, had called the Cossack Lieutenant Rasteriaïeff and instructed him to send for his regiment.

"In two hours time we'll settle the enemy," he said.

Rasteriaïeff wrote a despatch and went down to the bridge, where the Cossacks by turns stood on sentry duty. It was Victor Modjalevsky's turn. Rasteriaïeff, having noted the exact hour on the despatch, put it into an envelope and handed it to the Cossack, saying:

"Mind you, Vitia, it is urgent. Give it to Colonel Karpoff."

"I understand," Modjalevsky answered curtly, looking at the little yellow envelope with greedy eyes. He ran down the bank of the river and crossed a small plank-bridge with shaky railings.

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For three months Modjalevsky had hung about at the regimental headquarters doing his utmost to ingratiate himself with the adjutant and Karpoff, all the while studying the Commander's character. He kept in mind the precepts of Korjikkoff and the instructions worked out at Zimmerwald. "The war must end in defeat," Lenin had said. Colonels such as Karpoff would lead to victory. He noticed how the ice between Karpoff's Cossacks and the infantry kept daily melting. The infantry officers spoke with due respect of the Cossacks and the Cossacks felt friendly towards the infantry. The half-despising nick-name of "Kazatchki" was used by the soldiers in an endearing tone and as a rule they called them with pride "our Cossacks."

"That won't do," thought Victor, "if men are cemented by love and confidence they are certain to be victorious and my task will fail."

He went to the back of the hut where the detail was quartered and after wetting the envelope opened it with ease.

He read the contents and with his pencil altered the number fourteen to sixteen, thus giving him two hours respite: the despatch had been written at two o'clock and now read as four.

For days Karpoff had been nervous with expectation. Every day, at an appointed hour, he received detailed reports from Rasteriaïeff and attentively followed every move of the infantry.

That very morning he had received word that the battle would take place between twelve and fourteen o'clock and that Rasteriaïeff would send him word when to start.

At two in the afternoon, towards the beginning of the heavy artillery-fire, the regiment was placed under saddle and the squadrons were assembled in the yards. Karpoff wanted to start but Kumskoff kept him back.

"There's plenty of time, Colonel," he said. "There's nothing worse than arriving too soon: the men lose their energy and get slack."

"You're right, Gueorgui Petrovitch. I'm afraid, however, that something must have happened to Rasteriaïeff."

"He's a reliable officer, Colonel."

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"But supposing he's been killed."

"Why, then Alpatoff's there."

Now the red sun was setting towards the horizon. The thunder of the cannon and the clatter of the bursting shells broke off of a sudden, followed by an indistinct noise.

"What does that mean, Kumskoff," exclaimed Karpoff, grasping his arm. His adjutant was standing by his side, pale and with wide-open eyes.

"That, Colonel, is the sound of a hurrah! They have begun the attack and here we are eight miles off. We must start at once. Bugler! sound the alarm."

Five minutes later the regiment was on its way to Novy Kortchin at full trot. It was getting dusk already. The sun had set and the moon hung high in the sky. Two Cossacks appeared coming from the opposite direction, in one of whom Karpoff recognized Modjalevsky. The latter delivered his envelope to Karpoff who did not even take the trouble to open it. By the calm that had set in, the calm of victory, Karpoff had already realized, without reading the report, that all was over and that he had not left in time.

"Why so late," cried he to Victor, without stopping.

"I can't tell," was Victor's loud and distinct reply.

The regiment continued trotting down to the river and, as the bridge was taken up by a crowd of prisoners who were being escorted to the town, Karpoff turned aside to the ford which the horses crossed belly-deep. On the other side of the river Karpoff and his regiment set off at full speed. Soldiers in numbers came their way across the field. With their capes tucked up in front, with their caps shoved to the back of their heads and with their guns flung over their shoulders they gave the impression of bold and valiant conquerors.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves for being so late, comrades," a young soldier exclaimed: "We are overtaking them on foot and you can't even manage it on horse-back."

"Kazatchki, Kazatchki," densely said an infantry officer, his face flushed and excited by running, "we've nearly taken the battery, and where have you been all this time?"

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"Whip-lashers," a rancorous voice muttered from the dusk. "You're devils for oppressing peaceful folk, whereas when it comes to fighting you're nowhere!"

A shrill whistle pierced the darkness, and so full of scorn and mockery was it, that Karpoff and his Cossacks felt as though they had been horse-whipped. Karpoff involuntarily looked back and his eyes caught the smile on Modjalevsky's face.

"What are you laughing at, you blackguard!" Karpoff shouted, whereupon Victor's face instantly took a serious expression.

A crowd of soldiers filled the air with loud voices.

"I ran after the enemy for at least two miles," a joyful young voice was telling, gasping for breath. "I nearly caught one of them but it was impossible as he was mounted and I—on foot."

"When I caught him by the throat, he dropped his sabre. 'Come along, Your Honour,' I says to him, 'you're my prisoner.'"

"He fired at me, when he was as close to me as you are—but missed me, thank God."

"I stuck my bayonet into his belly so it made his eyes roll."

"If only the cavalry had come in time! We'd have had them all."

"The worst of it is, that they have succeeded in saving their artillery."

Colonel Dorman, in the best of spirits, beaming with joy and filled with the pride of victory met Karpoff amidst the dead bodies of some Austrian soldiers slain in the fray.

"What do you mean, my dear Sir, by coming so late?" he said to Karpoff in a tone of bitter reproach. "You could have captured a division and a half and six batteries. My mounted orderlies succeeded in taking two guns."

The blood rushed to Karpoff's face, but he made no answer.

"Now it's all over. You can go home. I don't need you any longer. I'll intrench myself here, and shall report to the army corps that I'm not to be blamed for being still here and not at Stolin."

"I'll overtake them," said Karpoff with restraint.

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"Where! Under the devil's tail? The enemy's sure to have taken shelter in trenches by this time."

"I'll overtake them," Karpoff repeated firmly and turned his horse.

He was seething with rage. He could remember nothing except that he had been insulted along with his gallant Cossacks, and that for no fault of his.

The regiment, formed in reserve column close by, was awaiting him. The Cossacks sat with bent brows. They were hurt to the bottom of their hearts and felt that their Commander was to blame.

"Third and fourth squadrons at full trot to Stolin," Karpoff shouted. "Captain Kargalskoff takes the lead, Lieutenant-Colonel Korshounoff follows at a distance of half a verst with the remaining squadrons."

He had worked out a plan which promised to be successful.

Karpoff rode behind the centre of the Cossacks and pictured to himself quite vividly the coming fight.

Over there, some eight miles distant, the remnants of the Austrian division must be treading the deep mud in a crowd. They are demoralized by the defeat. The worn-out horses can hardly drag the guns. A cold, deceptive moon-light night adds to their feeling of depression. "I'll cross the wood to the right of that column and make a cavalry charge on it," he thought. "They'll surrender. They can't help surrendering. I'll show what stuff the Cossacks are made of! I'll capture prisoners and guns not from among the infantry but quite independently in an intrepid night-action. My moon-light charge will figure in the annals of military history, the battle of Stolin will be studied like that of Begli-Akhmet and Karpoff's name will be covered with fame."

Abandoned vans, field-kitchens, and knapsacks, scattered along the road, proved how great had been the panic and weariness that had overcome the Austrian infantry. Four miles from Novy Kortchin two guns with limbers stood axle-deep in the marshy ground by the side of the road.

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The village of Khvalibogovitze was close by and the road rose at this point to a small mound.

Bright yellow lights flashed along the mound, accompanied by the crackling of rifle-shots. Khvalibogovitze was in the hands of the enemy, ready for resistance. The bullets snapped all around. Two of the Cossack horses fell and one Cossack bent over his saddle-bow with a moan.

"Halt," Karpoff shouted. "That's their rear-guard. There can barely be a company here. Captain Kargalskoff, take the centre troop slightly to one side and wait. I'll outflank them with the other troops. Gueorgui Petrovitch follow me, let's see what's up."

A narrow but clean and firm foot-path led to the right of the wide muddy road trodden down by the retreating Austrians. As soon as Sardanapalus had set foot on it, he snorted and, willingly obeying his master's spurs, started at a field-gallop towards the wood. Kumskoff, Loukianoff, Pastoukhoff and Modjalevsky galloped behind. Once in the dark wood they involuntarily pulled in their horses and went at foot's-pace. The horses threaded their way along the soft path covered with brown leaves quite noiselessly. The moon spread its silver rays on the wet trunks of the beech-trees and ashes and shone on the remnants of unmelted snow. Rain-drops fell from the trees on the dry leaves with a sound like cautious foot-steps approaching. To the left the wood became more open towards the outskirt, beyond which lay some hills and the village of Khvalibogovitze. Karpoff pulled up, dismounted, and went to the edge of the wood.

Loukianoff, the bugler, and Modjalevsky followed; the adjutant walked by his side. They reached the edge. The moonlit village, as seen from the dark wood, seemed quite luminous. Every hut, every orchard could be distinctly discerned on the background of the sky. The firing kept on but only on the left side opposite the highroad, where flashes broke the darkness.

"So I thought," Karpoff whispered. "There's barely one company. Hasten at once to Korshounoff and lead him to this spot by the same path. We'll send the second troop on foot to

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the village, and outflank them with the other troops. Instruct Kargalskoff to join the regiment with his troop. You've understood me?"

"Yes, Sir," answered Kumskoff, who hurried off.

Karpoff remained standing on the edge of the wood. His staff-bugler stood five paces off. Modjalevsky stepped back.

A loud shot, quite close by, started Karpoff, who, looking back, saw Loukianoff fall without a moan to the ground, where he lay still. Karpoff had hardly time to realize from where and by whom the shot had been fired when he was dazzled by another flash, a fearful blow in the chest knocked him off his legs and he fell to the ground, bleeding profusely. At the same moment he saw Modjalevsky's youthful face bending over him and, under the impression that Modjalevsky intended to aid him, he was on the point of addressing him. But Modjalevsky was looking at him with hatred and was slowly drawing his sabre from his scabbard. Karpoff tried to seize his revolver but in that instant a blow on the skull stunned him, red sparks flickered before his eyes and he lost the sensation of life.

Victor pushed Karpoff with his foot and, having ascertained that he was dead, sheathed his sabre and hastily ran to the village occupied by the Austrians.

Ten minutes of suspense went by, when the indistinct sound of approaching cavalry echoed through the wood. Korshounoff and Kumskoff appeared at the head of the regiment.

Korshounoff made a sign to the squadrons to stop and rode to the outskirt of the wood. Two corpses—that of the Commander and of the staff-bugler lay on the green moss bathed by the rays of the moon. Both were killed from behind and nearly point-blank, besides which Karpoff had a fractured skull. The volunteer Victor Modjalevsky had disappeared without leaving any traces. A dreadful suspicion came over the Cossacks. Sergeant Alpatoff and the Cossack Polshinsky were convinced that no one but Victor had murdered the Commander, but all kept silent.

The news of their beloved Commander's death was a blow, like a thunder-bolt to the whole regiment. The energy of the

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men gave place to apathy. Korshounoff had not sufficient strength of will to carry through Karpoff's plan. The history of cavalry is the history of its Commanders. The leader who had been capable of planning that bold nocturnal charge was dead and no one was there to replace him.

Karpoff's regiment returned low-spirited and down-cast, without trophies and bearing the dead body of their Commander. Its fame faded for ever. He knew what he was doing, who preached the covenant of Mecht, saying: "Slay the best of the gentiles, smash out the brains of the best of the serpents."

Victor, in smashing Karpoff's brains, had smashed those of his regiment.

The motor-car of the Red Cross in which Matzneff sat supporting Sablin, who lay on a stretcher by his side, bumped over a ditch between the field and the highroad. The shock roused Sablin, who opened his eyes with a groan.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"With me, my dear Sasha," answered Matzneff gently.

Sablin raised his eyes and, recognizing his companion, smiled mildly.

"Ah my worthy philosopher!" he said; "what an unexpected meeting. How about the battery?" he asked with anxiety.

"The battery's captured, Sasha. You and your division have added the most glorious page to the history of our regiment and not only of our regiment, but of the entire cavalry, of our whole Russian army. Four pieces of artillery! Our brave men destroyed the whole crew. You have saved the infantry."

Sablin was listening to him with a strange indifference, as though Matzneff was narrating some fact that had happened long ago, dull and uninteresting. He smiled feebly, endeavoured by strength of will to recall all that had happened, but could remember nothing. There had been a race and Diana, riderless and under a soldier's saddle, had overtaken him. Why was Diana under a soldier's saddle?

"And what about Kolia?" he suddenly asked with anxiety.

"You are a hero, Sasha," Matzneff went on unheeding his inquiry about his son. "You are now a great hero. The St.

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George's cross for you is a dead certainty. Prince Repnin has cabled about you to the Emperor."

Sablin listened to him without grasping what he said. The measured buzz of the machine and the soft sway of the motor-car on its springs kept him from concentrating his mind.

"Where are you taking me to?" he asked.

"Straight to Warsaw, to the best hospital, where you'll be under the care of the best surgeons and of Alexandra Petrovna. Do you remember her?"

Sablin frowned. He did remember her and a certain adventure in connection with Matzneff. The latter understood him.

"You won't know her again. She's separated from her husband and has become a regular saint. She's now working in the soldiers' section. What do you say to that? Who could ever have supposed, that Sasha Rostovtzeff would condescend to wash filthy wounds?"

Presently the throb of the motor lulled him into delirious sleep.

At times he would awake to see the dark pine-forest float past him and Matzneff's white hand close by his face, and he would then relapse into the same state of drowsiness.

Cool evening air followed the heat of the day, the stars began to glitter in the sky, here and there lights were to be seen and the red sunset was reflected on the blue sky. Of a sudden he was roused by an unusual noise and by the sight of brilliantly burning lanterns. The motor-car had stopped.

"Where am I?" Sablin asked, half-dazed and noticing several people around the car.

"At Warsaw," Matzneff replied. "We've arrived."

On the way to the hospital-ward Sablin swooned away.

For several days he lay at times conscious, at times in a state of drowsiness or of utter unconsciousness. In his dreams he saw himself lying in bed surrounded by a crowd of half-grown human beings with huge heads and small bodies, such as are drawn in caricatures. They seemed to move to and fro, sometimes filling the room, at other times suddenly disappearing, talking among themselves without making a sound. Though

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they did him no harm, Sablin was disturbed by their presence and unable to rid himself of them. At times the shadows of full-grown, normal looking human beings would appear in their midst and start doing something with Sablin, whereupon the dwarfs would disappear, making room for complete darkness and a feeling of calm, akin to nirvana. Then, after a certain lapse of time which Sablin could not estimate, he'd again be lying in a low room, with the same crowd of big-headed dwarfs fussing about his bed, talking in silence, disappearing and re-appearing and causing him a sensation of unutterable uneasiness.

By and by the taller, shadow-like figures became more distinct, gradually taking the shape of real human beings, and Sablin began to distinguish who they were. The first figure he recognized to be that of a short and bulky man with a red beard and moustache, in a white surgeon's gown with sleeves fastened at the wrists, who was touching him with cold, cleanly washed fingers. That touch brought him a sensation of ease and well-being. Sablin knew him to be the famous surgeon Evald, who had operated on him. The other figure was tall and clad in a long full petticoat and a black nun's head-gear, showing a narrow white band on the forehead. The head-gear itself, composed of a large black kerchief, fell over the shoulders to the waist. Small white hands with elegant and slender fingers and soft palms, cold and dry, carefully touched the aching places, alleviating the pain by their touch. The whole oval of the face was covered by the kerchief, but large grey eyes peered attentively from under the preoccupied frowning brows. The soft shine of these eyes made up for the irregularity of the features. Sablin knew this figure to be that of Alexandra Petrovna Rostovtzeff, a friend of Countess Paltoff's, to whom she had in his presence asserted that a woman has the right of mentally undressing a man, as men always do to women. Alexandra Petrovna had quite seriously expressed her opinion that if husbands are allowed to flirt with maid-servants their wives ought to be allowed the same privilege with lackeys and grooms.

"Your Ivan," she had said addressing Princess Paltoff, "is a

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very handsome man and I wouldn't object to having an affair with him."

She was known for her "esprit mal tourné" and was feared in society when young girls were present.

And now this very same Alexandra Petrovna beamed with the supernatural humility of her large grey eyes and all her sinfulness seemed to have vanished. It took Sablin a long time to recognize the third figure, that would chiefly appear at night, when Alexandra Petrovna, the assistants and the sick nurses had left. Whenever Sablin moaned or moved restlessly in his sleep this person would come up to his bed-side as quietly and as imperceptibly as a ghost and sit by him, putting his soft hand on Sablin's feverish brow. That touch invariably calmed Sablin's delirious restlessness and he would drop off into a deep and quiet slumber, from which he would awake in the morning feeling much stronger.

Gradually, his strong constitution prevailed. His nightmares vanished, and he was able to ascertain that the third individual was the priest of the Nth infantry regiment, Father Vassily, who had been severely wounded in Eastern Prussia and was now recovering in this hospital. He shared with Sablin a spacious room with painted walls and a large window showing upon the garden with its autumn-leaved trees.

Sablin awoke in the dead of night. A dim light fell from the electric lamp hanging from the ceiling. The blind was down and rain beat restlessly against the window-panes, which every now and then were struck from outside by the branches of the trees, while the water flowing in mighty torrents from the roof down the gutter splashed into the water-barrels below. Sablin's heart ached as though under the foreboding of something inevitable.

He knew all that had happened. He knew that Kolia's head had been blown off by a shell, that Rotbek had been killed, that nearly all the youths he had led to the charge had perished and that he was alive and would go on living and in good health. The St. George's cross sent to him personally by His Majesty was lying on a little table by his bed-side under a bunch of

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shaggy chrysanthemums, a useless trinket, which only the more underlined the darkness and disconsolateness of his life. His memory disclosed to his mental view a whole series of painful moments: his interview with Prince Repnin about Kitty, Lubovin's insult, Rasputin, his mutilated son. . . . Sablin tossed about in his bed, moaning with mental pain.

"You are awake," he heard a gentle voice say, "you are suffering again. Let me assist you."

A light was switched on on Father Vassily's table, which he carefully shaded with a book, so that the light fell on a corner of the priest's bed and part of the wall only.

"Thanks, don't trouble," Sablin answered.

The priest donned his under-cassock and his pectoral cross attached to a brand-new St. George's ribbon, combed out his long hair and beard and, seating himself under the lamp, proceeded to read a small book which Sablin guessed to be the Holy Testament.

Sablin looked at him. The priest had a comely, even handsome and inspired face, with a small curly beard, like Christ's face as usually represented on Russian ikons. It was thin and pale and his eyes, encircled by long dark eyelashes, were of a greyish blue hue. His age might as well have been fifty as twenty-five. His auburn hair, thick and wavy, showed here and there a trace of grey; he had small wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, and his lips, thin and dry, were overhung by a dark moustache.

Sablin scrutinized him.

The priest lifted his head, looked at Sablin with a meek and gentle expression and said:

"And the fool said in his heart: 'There is no God.'"

Sablin, startled, sat upright in his bed.

"How did you happen to say that, Father," he asked.

"I read it here," the priest answered.

"But how is it you read it aloud. How could you tell that I was just then thinking that there was no God."

And Sablin told the priest all about the tragedy of Lubovin's insult, Victor's birth and Marousia's death, which put an end

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to his love-affairs. He had succeeded in vanquishing the demon of sensuality and in finding peaceful satisfaction in his pure love towards Vera Constantinovna and his children. And how had the Almighty rewarded him for his victory over his own self? Rasputin, Vera Constantinovna's tragical suicide and the useless death of his son! And then he had loved the Emperor, the Empress and the Russian nation with an exalted love, and what had been the result?

Sablin spoke excitedly, at times incoherently, with tears in his eyes and bitterness in his tone, as though trying to excuse himself for having dared lose his faith in God.

After that the priest talked long and earnestly.

When Sablin woke the next day, he noticed that Father Vasily had gone; his bed had been carefully done and the hospital-report was being taken from above the bed by a servant.

"Where is the Father?" Sablin inquired.

"Sir," the servant answered. "He left early this morning. He got up, packed his things and left straight for the front."

"He had already obtained his discharge last night from the head-surgeon and only stayed over night, because, as he said, he had some work to finish here. He regretted very much, that Your Honour was still asleep, but he did not wish to wake you. He asked me to deliver this parcel to you."

Sablin untied the parcel and found in it a small volume of the Holy Gospel in a soft black leather binding. Sablin opened it and noticed that some passages had been marked in red pencil. The book opened on one of these passages and Sablin read: ". . . for I am meek and lowly at heart."

Alexandra Petrovna came in with a bunch of shaggy chrysanthemums.

"There, you see," she said, "your companion, Father Vassily, has been able to leave the hospital. Soon you likewise will get your ticket of leave. I am so happy. You are both of you my patients and I have rescued both from death."

Her eyes shone with kindness and joy. Her irregular face seemed beautiful.

"I thank you, Alexandra Petrovna. . . . You have done so

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much for me—both you and Father Vassily. You have saved my body and Father Vassily—my soul.”

Alexandra Petrovna looked into Sablin’s eyes.

“I’ve a very, very important favour to ask of you,” she said, in a tremulous voice.

“What is it?”

“To begin with I must congratulate you: You have been appointed Commander of the Nth hussar regiment.” Her Majesty the Empress was the first to congratulate you. Nicholai Nicholaievitch writes that this nomination is for two months only; they intend appointing you to command the Nth cavalry division on Her Majesty’s special wish.”

“I guess the favor you require of me. But you know how difficult it is for me to write to the Empress?”

“If it had been an easy task, I should not have asked you to do it.”

Sablin took the paper from Alexandra Petrovna’s hands and wrote in a firm hand-writing: “I am deeply touched by Your Imperial Majesty’s attention and devotedly offer You, Tsaritsa, my gratitude for Your kind wishes. I shall strive, at the head of my regiment, towards victory and Russia’s fame, which for me stand above all. Colonel Sablin, aide-de-camp.”

“Send it,” he said.

Alexandra Petrovna read the telegram, bent towards Sablin and kissed him.

“God bless you,” she said.

A fortnight later, entirely recovered from his wounds, he left for the army to take charge of the Nth hussar regiment. Early in the spring of 1915 he was already at the head of a brigade, and during that same summer he was appointed to command the Nth cavalry division.

All these honors were met by him with Christian humility: he accepted the increasing responsibility as a burden and directed his whole effort towards the improvement of the regiments that were under his command.

Lieutenant (Khoroundji) Alexei Ivanovitch Karpoff was wounded in the chest by a machine-gun on the 11th September

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1915, during the battle of Jeliesnitza. He had joined his regiment only a couple of months previously and loved it with that particular feeling that characterizes very pure youths, unacquainted with sexual love. Everything in the regiment filled him with pride and he admired, with the same enamoured ecstasy, the old Colonel Protopopoff, commanding the regiment, the stout and clumsy Cossack-Captain (essaoul) Ivanoff, his officer-comrades and all the Cossacks. Everything seemed to him "deuced" fine, an expression which he owed to his Cadet-school times and which, in spite of his efforts to avoid it, escaped him involuntarily. Karpoff was a very good-looking, dark youth, slightly above middle size, well built, with fine, honest and bright dark eyes veiled by long eye-lashes, and with a sprouting moustache overshadowing his upper lip.

The battle of Jeliesnitza had been his first experience of a serious action. The dismounted cavalry had encountered the German infantry, which occupied a fortified village. This burning village had been stormed by moon-light across a boggy field intersected by numerous ditches and the Cossacks had remained victorious, capturing German machine-guns and prisoners. Young Karpoff had witnessed the retreat of the Germans, had pursued them and, noticing a German soldier lying with a machine-gun, had made a rush at him together with his Cossacks Kushetsoff, Skatchoff, Likhovidoff and Barannikoff, had been wounded and turned a summersault, had nearly come to the ground, continuing his pursuit until he had seen Barannikoff strike the German with his bayonet, while Likhovidoff and Skatchkoff possessed themselves of the machine-gun. Karpoff, spitting blood, had run along the flame-lit road which was clouded with smoke. Cossacks were hurrying to and fro, someone shouted "forward, forward," but at that moment his strength failed him and he dropped on a heap of logs in the middle of the road, staring around with wide-open eyes and unable at times to realize whether he was asleep or the victim of a horrible nightmare.

Two Cossacks passed by with a machine-gun. They noticed Karpoff and approached him.

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"What is amiss with you, Your Honour," asked one.

Karpoff made an effort to reply, but the sound of his voice was choked by a clot of thick, hot blood which stuck in his throat. He tried to pull himself together but fell in the attempt. He did not lose his senses, but it seemed to him as though he were dreaming.

"You are wounded. That's unfortunate. Akimtzeff! stay here with his Honour, while I fetch a stretcher. Mind the machine-gun, so the other soldiers do not get hold of it. The whole division is coming this way."

Akimtzeff helped Karpoff into a more comfortable position and the latter could now see the bright moonlit sky. The rattle of rifle and machine-gun shots sounded a couple of miles off. The battle was still being fought, but for Karpoff it had, to his great surprise, lost all interest. He fancied himself reliving all the incidents of the battle and thought them "deuced" fine. He had dashed into the village at the head of his company (sotnia), clad in a brand-new "French" tunic and Galiffet breeches, feeling "deuced" smart. The fact of his having been wounded seemed to him "deuced" sporting. He never once thought of the eventual result of his wound. Since he was able to move his arms and legs there was evidently nothing wrong with them. He had only been wounded in the chest and that was hardly worth fretting about. He fancied the Emperor visiting him and inquiring after his health, whereupon he would have answered: "My wound is trifling and not worth Your Majesty's notice." He never once asked himself why His Majesty should think of visiting him and taking an interest in his state. He pictured to himself very vividly all the particulars of his visit and gradually relapsed from the world of actuality into that of dream-land.

II

SOME ambulance attendants appeared with stretchers, and carried Karpoff to the ambulance-car. While he was being shoved into the car, he heard a voice inquiring whether it was full.

"Chock full," was the rejoinder—"go ahead."

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The wheels scraped through the sand and Karpoff once again felt inclined to communicate to someone his battle deeds. The car was however completely dark and he could not distinguish the inmates. Some individual's heavy, muddy boots protruded within a few inches of his face. Beyond these someone lay groaning and moaning, crying "oh! oh!" in a piteous way and causing Karpoff a nightmarish feeling.

A thick pine-wood, silver-lit by the moonshine, faced a small field with a wooden house, in front of which nurses in white head-dresses were moving to and fro. One of these nurses in a black leather-jacket with a red-cross sleeve-band, approached Karpoff wearily and bending over him asked what his name was. Karpoff answered automatically, as he used to do when quite a child:

"Aliosha!"

"Your family name, I mean," repeated the nurse without even smiling.

"Karpoff, Khoroundji Karpoff," he replied and was on the point of beginning his narrative, when a voice from the front-door inquired:

"What number?"

"The one hundred and ninety-fifth, Sonia," replied the nurse. "Isvarine has just died," the voice went on.

A surgeon in a white apron, a young nurse and a stout dark woman with large, fine eyes stood leaning over him.

"Sofia Lvovna," said the nurse in charge of Karpoff. "A wounded officer has just been brought in."

"One moment," answered the stout woman. "Place him in that corner and undress him."

A feeling of shame overcame Karpoff when the nurse in the leather jacket, bending towards him, began to unfasten the straps of his equipment and the buttons of his tunic.

"Let me do it myself," he cried, but he had no control over his hands and was obliged to submit to the nurse's dexterous fingers.

Another sister approached and they both started washing Karpoff's blood-stained chest, whereupon he swooned away. On

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recovering his senses he noticed that he was lying on the floor on a bed of straw. Wounded soldiers and Cossacks were likewise lying on straw beddings 'round about him. The sun had risen and the room was bathed in daylight. The nurses and stout Sofia Lvovna, their faces worn and livid, were pacing to and fro, exchanging short phrases. A nurse placed an iron jug of tea and two English biscuits within Karpoff's reach. "Can you manage it by yourself?" she inquired. "I'll prop you up."

Only then did Karpoff notice that his chest was entirely bandaged up and that he had a clean shirt on. With the aid of the nurse he sat up.

"Tell me, please, about the battle?" he inquired.

"They are still fighting," was the answer.

"You know, it was 'deuced' fine. Our regiment. . . ."

But the sister had turned away.

"I'm coming. I thought you were asleep," she said addressing a soldier lying close by and who had asked for tea.

"The General in command of the division has arrived," said a fair-haired nurse with big eyes like those of a fish, as she walked into the room. "And fancy there are wounded soldiers lying in the dressing-shed. What are we to do?"

"To begin with," replied Sofia Lvovna, "see to that one being carried out: he is dying."

She dried her hands with a towel. At that moment a handsome young-looking General made his appearance. From the door-way he surveyed the room with his bright eyes and frowned.

"I expect you find it hard to forward them on," he said.

"Your Excellency, over four hundred and eighty-six wounded have passed through our hands in the course of last night."

"You are right; it was a stiff fight."

The General approached Karpoff.

"You are an officer?" he inquired.

"Yes, Your Excellency," answered Karpoff making an effort to raise himself. "Lieutenant Karpoff."

"I remember. You own a splendid chestnut. I've never seen

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a finer specimen under a Cossack officer's saddle. Where are you wounded? In the chest?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"Do you suffer much?"

"Not in the least. I hardly feel the wound. I, however, find it hard to breathe," answered Karpoff with a smile.

"Were you wounded at Jeliesnitza?"

"Yes, Your Excellency; it was a 'deuced' smart fight. I . . . the machine-gun. . . ."

"Your father was in command of the Don regiment, I believe, and was killed last year on the river Nida?"

"Quite so, Your Excellency. When you gave the order to dismount near that wood, I. . . ."

"Sofia Lvovna," said the General, without heeding Karpoff. "I shall send you my motor-car to fetch those who are badly wounded. Send Lieutenant Karpoff straight to Sarna, with my note to the superintendent of Her Majesty's ambulance-train. Write the note, Warlam Nikolaievitch!" and with these words the General in command of the division left the room without even looking at Karpoff.

In the train Karpoff had a berth in the officers' car. Next to him lay a lean unshaven man with a yellow, sickly complexion wrapped in a brown dressing-gown. He viewed Karpoff with an unfriendly look while the latter was being lifted into the spare berth and then, with evident disgust, he turned his back on him. The dressing-gown slipped off his shoulders, discovering sharp shoulder-blades protruding through his shirt. The train remained stationary ever so long. The nurses distributed bowls of cabbage soup and meat, which Karpoff, who had had no food for three days, ate with appetite. His chest ached and he at times found it hard to breathe, but on the whole he felt fairly strong, was full of spirits and had more than ever a longing to give a detailed description of the Jeliesnitza battle and of the active part he had taken in it.

"Sister, how about me?" said his neighbour, with a hoarse voice, turning on his berth and addressing the nurse.

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"You know, Wertzinsky, that you mayn't," the nurse rejoined. "I shall bring you some warm milk."

While Karpoff was enjoying his food, Wertzinsky scrutinized him closely and Karpoff felt uneasy under his sharp, unfriendly gaze.

"Where are you wounded?" was Wertzinsky's unexpected question.

"In the chest," Karpoff answered unwillingly.

"Lucky man. Well, I expect you will drop this disgusting show entirely now?"

"I don't understand."

"I mean to say, that you hardly intend returning to the front. You can easily find a job as train-surveyor or some similar employment far away from this brutal slaughter."

"You are wrong. As soon as I recover I shall again join my regiment. On one hand I am glad, on the other sorry to have been wounded. I am glad because my wound is a proof of the active part I took in the fight. I was wounded at a distance of hardly thirty paces and had already drawn my sword. I am sorry because, wounded as I am, I have had, for the time being, to leave my regiment; not for long, I hope."

"To my mind you ought to be pleased. Is it possible that you are not sick of it?"

"Of the regiment? Great Heavens, no! The regiment represents part of my life. It is, so to speak, my family. My father was killed in action last year and my mother is now working as nurse in a hospital at Novotcherkask."

"You are a Cossack?"

"Yes, a Don Cossack."

"Hum."

Wertzinsky looked at Karpoff inquisitively and the latter kept silent.

"Did you enlist of your own free will?" asked Wertzinsky.

"Yes."

"You were, maybe, trained that way by your parents?"

"As far back as I can remember I have worn shoulder-straps, a sword and a gun. The first words I uttered were words of

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military command and my first song was a Cossack war-ditty. Then I was placed into the Cadet-school, where everything was so 'deuced' smart, and finished my military education in the Cavalry-school."

"What's your family name?"

"Karpoff. We descend from the famous Karpoff, who in 1812. . . ."

"Excuse me, but that does not interest me. You are a human being in traces, something in the style of Tchekhoff's fellow in an instrument case. Maybe, however, you have not read Tchekhoff?"

"I have read some of his works, but not all."

"I thought so. You and I look upon life from diametrically opposite points of view. You, for instance, rejoice at having been wounded, whereas I—putting aside the fact of my being physically handicapped by it,—loathe my wound, looking upon it as being a moral offence, an unheard of injustice. I, sub-lieutenant Wertzinsky, at the age of 32, am still only a subaltern, which speaks for itself. I have always hated and despised the military service, I have an aversion for the military class. I passed with honours (gold medal) from the classical Gymnasium into the philological section of the University, am now teacher of Latin and one of the leading Latinists. My work on Seneca has been translated into all the European languages. I had started a translation of Ovid into corresponding verse and, if I had completed that work, I should have attained European fame. I had of course, to go through my obligatory military service, served as volunteer in one of the Petrograd regiments. I did absolutely nothing, incapable as I was even to unscrew a bayonet. In my capacity of learned man I met with due respect and my Commander used me as teacher to his children. For form's sake I was advised to pass my examination as sub-lieutenant of the reserve. Yes, young man, I have attained that most honourable rank and as such have been called to the front.

"Do you consider that reasonable? For a year and a half I have been chased over the fields of Galicia, have been forced to shoot at my brothers, the Czeko Slovaks; I was obliged to for-

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get that I was a rising professor of Latin literature. And now here I am with a wound in my stomach. Do you call this fair, young man? I am married and have children. Two children, who, you bet, are not adorned with shoulder-straps and do not strut about with swords and guns. What have I suffered for, pray? Eh? Answer me, young man! You please me: there is a certain antique beauty in your gaze. Maybe I am destined to hear from your lips that unexisting truth, which perchance might mitigate the suffering inflicted on me by all this injustice. Tell me, oh youth, who reminds me of a Greek God, for whose sake am I going to die?"

Karpoff felt sorry for this nervous, resentful invalid. He felt that his answer, based on what, to him, seemed the essence of life, would not satisfy Wertzinsky, whose general view of life was so different. And yet his unrelenting faith in their magical power caused him to utter the following words:

"For the sake of your faith, your Tsar and your native land."

Wertzinsky burst out laughing. His livid face, with a long hawk-like nose, became distorted by a smile full of hatred. The effort caused by his laughter evidently gave him acute pain which was reflected in his eyes.

"I do not believe in God. I am an atheist. A man of learning cannot believe in God. I admit that Christ's teaching has high philosophical merits. Other well known philosophers, however, have shown more depth. To die for the sake of my faith? Which faith do you mean? The Greek orthodox? Why should I, considering I was christened in the Roman Catholic faith, which I disavow, as I would any other? For the sake of my Tsar? I, a democratic socialist, who would rather kill the Tsar than die for his sake? Your so-called 'mother-country' is represented to me by the universe. I studied at Rome, where I felt more at home than in Vilna, my native town. Patriotism is not recognized by men of high culture. It suits savages and nations on the decline: Rome perished owing to the Romans' pride in their superiority. 'Civis romanus' sounded too ambitious. Our contemporary writer Gorky is of opinion

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that the word 'human being' has a much more glorious meaning than the words 'Russian,' 'Pole,' etc."

"How could you fight under such circumstances?"

"That's where the whole tragedy lies, young man. Here you are, wounded and yet beaming with joy. A hero! Now come, confess that you look upon yourself as a hero. Eh? With a fair sweet-heart, perhaps, waiting for you somewhere? The sequel to some insipid post-card or illustration with following inscription: 'Back from the war.' An arm in a sling, a white head-gear, big dreamy eyes. For the sake of faith, the Tsar and patriotism! Admitting you are a hero: What kind of a hero am I? I ought to have fled from all those horrors and yet, there I was, attacking, lying in ambush and starting off again. Can you explain to me the reason why and for whose sake I acted thus? I, an unbeliever, an internationalist, disavowing the existence of a mother-country."

"I do not know"—Karpoff replied. Terrified at the idea of having to answer Wertzinsky, the first socialist he had met face to face. Karpoff gazed at him with a mixture of awe and curiosity.

"You don't know why"—muttered Wertzinsky slowly and fiercely. "No more do I and therein lies the whole horror of my life and approaching death. And yet I followed the example of my brother-officers without protesting, instead of leading my soldiers out of the fray with orders to murder their superiors: I was mad."

Of a sudden the electric light was switched on, throwing a brilliant light on the white oil-painted walls of the car, which at the same moment started slowly with a swinging motion. Dim yellow lanterns floated past and the wheels, turning on their axles with a scraping sound, soon began beating rhythmical time which accelerated as the pace increased. The motion of the train soothed Karpoff to sleep. Wertzinsky lay half-conscious, with fearful thoughts in his mind. But he kept silent. Besides, to whom could he have communicated his thoughts? Surely not to that clump of beautiful cannon-fodder. "One born to crawl is incapable of flying," thought Wertzinsky, who

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for the following forty-eight hours never addressed a word to Karpoff; and both kept silent.

Late one night the train softly stopped at the Tsarskoïe Selo station. It was raining. The wide streets seemed mysteriously dark with their long rows of milky electric lanterns, vanishing gradually. Ambulance-men were fussing on the platform and carrying the wounded out of the cars.

A nurse, clad in a warm mantle, and in a white head-dress superintended the stretchers.

"Sister Valentine"—exclaimed a youth in a student's cap. "Here is a note from General Sablin directing Karpoff to us and recommending him to your special care. Please, if possible, find room for sub-lieutenant Wertzinsky, my former Latin teacher and a learned man."

"Badly wounded?"

"Yes, both of them: Karpoff has a chest-wound, which has begun to fester and Wertzinsky is wounded in the stomach."

"Now then," exclaimed Sister Valentine, "what are you waiting for? Help the wounded to be carried out of the train. Have you heard, Rita, that Sablin has addressed himself to us: that is a good omen. Maybe he has forgiven us."

"Alexandra Petrovna mentions in her letter from Warsaw that he has greatly changed since he was wounded and is now a good Christian"—answered Rita.

"What do you say to the battle of Jeliesnitza, Rita? I have always asserted that Sablin was a hero and a thorough soldier and, though he is not from the General staff, he has a powerful swing. The Sister-Superior writes that he is very popular at headquarters. He had been promoted to command the division only shortly before that brilliant victory."

"Sister Valentine, Karpoff can be forwarded in a carriage. As for Wertzinsky I urgently beg your permission to have him placed in the motor-car"—said the student.

The permission was granted.

The hospital to which Karpoff was brought was under the direct patronage of the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna and her daughters, the Grand Duchesses Olga and Tatiana, who took an

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active part in nursing the wounded. The Empress not only supervised the hospital but very often nursed the wounded herself, dressed their wounds and assisted at surgical operations. In the hospital it was forbidden to call her "Your Imperial Majesty" and instructions had been given to call her simply "Head-Sister." The Grand Duchesses were called "Sister Olga," "Sister Tatiana."

The Empress had put her whole soul into that hospital. Here she could rest after all her moral disturbances caused by misunderstanding and disillusion. She was conscious that to continue war meant ruin to Russia, at least to Imperial Russia, another Russia was beyond her conception. She pictured to herself an immediate, separate peace with Germany, a peace, which, very lucrative for Russia, would mean the possession of Constantinople, the Dardanelles and a part of Asia Minor, and the triumph of Monarchy.

She disliked the Emperor Wilhelm, whom she considered a hypocrite, but at the same time she could not bear to see the sufferings of the Russians. Her heart bled whenever an officer or a soldier died in her hospital. At night she would drive alone to their graves and pray by the simple wooden crosses. She realized the horrors of war and considered it her duty, as Empress, to put an end to them.

She was looked upon as a German, while she disliked Germany, but on the other hand she did not see enemies in the Germans, but neighbours with whom it was more profitable to be on good terms. She often went to her husband, at Supreme Headquarters, and always there met an inveterate, implacable hatred towards the Germans, an inclination for the French and unfailing loyalty to the word given to the allies. The Tsar, who in home policy seldom kept his word and was influenced by the advice of his ministers, of public officials, of his "entourage" and even of outsiders—faithfully respected the treaties with France and England, and she was unable to attain her end. The influence of his mother likewise stood in the way. The Empress Maria Feodorovna, while passing through Berlin in July 1914, had been insulted by the crowd and could not forget

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that insult. Alexandra Feodorovna was conscious that the nation did not side with her. Vague reports, that both the people and the army disliked her, had reached her ears. They could not forgive her intimacy with Rasputin, from whom on the other hand she could not part, having been bewitched by him. She considered him a saint. Cautiously and indirectly she was given to understand that Rasputin was a lewd peasant.

"Why am I not told so in a straightforward way?" she would say. She lived in a world of her own, full of mystery, of religious inspirations, of bliss in prayer and privations and in that world Rasputin seemed to her a prophet. She trembled for the life of her family and that life was connected by mysterious ties with that of Rasputin: in that she faithfully believed. Whenever Rasputin was removed the "heir" became subject to indefinable ailings and as soon as Rasputin was reinstalled and in favour, the "heir" would invariably recover his health and his good spirits. All the relatives of the Emperor, the whole Imperial family, were against Rasputin. All the more reason to see to his safety and the all greater became the intimacy between him and the Empress. She was always alone and sought relief in the hospital. There she wanted to prove to herself that all the rumours concerning her were untrue, that the nation and the army were fond of her and would follow her.

There were two sections at the hospital: one for officers—the other for soldiers. Both were splendidly organized. The wounded returned to their regiments full of pleasant reminiscences of their hospital-life, of the kindness and solicitude shown them by the Imperial family; but in the regiments they saw such cold, sometimes even hostile feelings towards the Empress, that, fearing the nickname of Imperial valets, they did not talk about their gratitude to the hospital, and a few of them, only, wrote touching letters to the Empress and to the Grand Duchesses. Not all these letters were sincere, but at the hospital they caused great joy and were looked upon as coming from the simple, noble hearts of Russian soldiers and as being a reflection of the feelings of the whole army.

At the palace the Empress found it impossible to hide her

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sufferings, the interest she took in Rasputin and the tears she shed at times. She decided, that, being a Christian, it was her duty to love her enemies, to alleviate the sufferings of the captives and especially of the wounded. She visited hospitals where Germans lay, and these visits were interpreted as a sign of her sympathy for the Germans and her disdain of the Russians. A monstrous falsehood was spread abroad about her and the Grand Duchesses and the hospital to which they had devoted themselves became the centre of lies and calumnies. She heeded them not, but the lies spread.

The Cossacks of the hospital guard had been sent to the front to join one of the Cossack divisions and they had brought with them stories of the inexplicable behaviour of the Empress, of Rasputin, of her evident sympathy for the Germans and these stories drowned the modest praises of Her Majesty's hospital. At the palace the Empress saw hostile glances, gloomy silence of the order of soldiers and of the Cossacks. She found it harder still during her journeys to the front. She was met and seen off in a cold official way. Some of the Generals gave her to understand, that, owing to her visit, army columns had been delayed to let her train pass, and that the consequences thereof were likely to affect the position at the front. She was told that there were rumours that she travelled to the front purposely to help the Germans by interrupting the transport. But she could not help renewing her visits to the Supreme Headquarters: she must influence "Nika," as she called the Emperor, she must see her son, who lived there. And all this made her suffer.

She rested only when she was at her hospital. Attending at dangerous surgical operations, or sitting at the bed-side of the dying and assisting at their last moments, she forgot her own sufferings. She often sat of an evening with her daughters among the convalescent. They played round games, had music and sang and it seemed to her that here, in this kind of family "entourage," the officers understood her and loved her like a mother.

It sometimes happened that, during the games, the young men transgressed the limits of propriety. The officers would

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throw indiscreet glances at the pretty young Grand Duchesses, keep their slender hands longer in theirs than was necessary. The sedate Sister Valentine drew the Empress' attention to these familiarities and Her Majesty did not reply at once. Then she said:

"Don't mind them. Let them enjoy themselves; they have so little happiness in store."

III

ALIËSHA at the age of nineteen knew nothing of love. At Novotcherkask he had paid no attention either to the boarding-school or other school-girls.

He had a chivalrous feeling towards women, and only two women existed for him: his mother whom he loved like a devoted son, and one whom he had never met, whom he only knew by her portraits, a woman of uncommon beauty, the Empress, for whose sake he was ready to sacrifice his life. He knew nothing of Rasputin. In his father's study and later on in the drawing-room of their Novotcherkask house he had seen the photograph of a beautiful, fair woman holding a boy on her lap and surrounded by four girls. That whole family had impressed Aliësha Karpoff as being a family to live up to, something superhuman. He looked upon them as upon something holy, not of this world. One only dared admire them, answer their questions, when addressed, in a mechanical, disciplined way, pray for them and die for their sake. They were every one of them beautiful to his eyes.

They were beautiful indeed, but had they even been monsters, they would have seemed beautiful to Aliësha, because they belonged to a world of dreams and not of reality. If he had been told that he could touch them, that their hands would touch his body, he would never have believed it. He remembered his father having often told him how he had embraced the Emperor at Easter and kissed the hand of the Empress. A China egg with flowers painted on it, a present of Her Majesty to his father, hung in their house under the image of the Don Virgin Mary. And his father had often told what a sensation of bliss-

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ful reverence had overcome him when his lips touched the scented little hand of the Russian "Tsaritsa." It was the hand of a divinity and not of a human being.

Sister Valentine came up with long firm strides to the bed in which Aliësha Karpoff was lying in a state of fever.

"Well, and how do you feel?" she asked.

"Fairly well, but my chest aches and I find it hard to breathe."

"You'll soon be quite well," she said, smoothing his pillows.

"Your operation has been fixed for today."

Aliësha looked at Sister Valentine with serious, childish eyes but without showing any fear.

"You can be operated upon under chloroform or without anæsthesia, as you choose. The wound must be cleaned, that is all."

"I'd rather have no chloroform," Aliësha answered. "I'm not a girl to be afraid of pain."

Sister Valentine smiled.

"The head-sister is going to assist the surgeon and Sister Tatiana will be in attendance. You know who they are?"

"No."

"Do you know where you are? In what town?"

"At Tsarskoie Selo."

"Yes, in Her Majesty's hospital. The Empress is the head-sister, and Sister Tatiana is the Grand Duchess Tatiana Nicholaïevna, and you have not to call them otherwise than Sisters."

"When is the operation to take place?" asked Aliësha, in a voice that was hardly audible.

"Between ten and eleven, and please, young man, don't excite yourself."

"No fear! I'm not a girl," said Aliësha, blushing.

At the same time he was extremely agitated, but not at the thought of being operated. He did not care about what was going to happen to his wound, nor did he think of the eventful consequences of the operation. His thoughts were exclusively bent towards the fact that the Empress and the Grand Duchess would see him at a disadvantage, that they would speak to him and that he would have to answer.

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At eleven sharp a woman in the severe garb of a sister of charity, with a pale face flushed with nervous excitement, came up to Aliësha and peremptorily said:

"Undress."

Aliësha gazed at her with wide-open eyes and did not move. He recognized her, whose portrait hung in their drawing-room, whom he looked upon as he would have on an image and who had been daily prayed for by his family. It seemed impossible to undress in her presence.

"Tania, come and help!" the fairy-like woman said.

The taper fingers of a young girl touched the buttons of his dressing-gown. A subtle scent of tender perfume glided past his face. If Aliësha had been told that it was the scent of a good English perfume obtainable by any one, he would not have believed it. To him it seemed a special Imperial perfume, something fairy-like. And awake though he was, he felt in fairy-land. The Emperor's daughter and someone else, Sister Valentine probably, took off his dressing-gown and stripped him of his shirt. He was carried to the surgical-room and placed on a high table covered with a white sheet. For a few seconds the Empress and the woman-surgeon attentively scrutinized the slim body of the youth lying before their eyes. Aliësha lay in their presence not knowing where to put his hands and burned with unspeakable shame. Such must be the feeling of an innocent young girl when looked at in a state of nakedness by a man. His heart beat with rapidity, and tears of deference and shame filled his eyes. He was undergoing excruciating and yet beautiful sensations.

"He looks well-fed. The operation is perfectly admissible," said a thin-looking woman preparing some instruments. "Sister Alexandra, maybe you will try yourself. It isn't very difficult."

The Empress' cool hand touched Aliësha's chest and slightly pressed the rim of the wound.

"Cover his legs and stomach," said the Empress.

Aliësha turned his bashful gaze to one side. Sister Tatiana came up to him with hardly audible steps and covered the nether

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part of his body with a clean sheet. This was more than Aliësha could stand. A bashful blush covered his face, then he turned lividly pale and swooned away.

On recovering his senses Aliësha found himself lying on his bed in the ward. The consciousness that what had happened was irreparable, the feeling of shame that had overcome him during the operation, racked his brain and he dared not open his eyes. Never, never again should he see those two women. He was reconciled to a certain extent to the thought that the Empress had seen him, as he would have admitted that his mother had seen his nakedness, but the Grand Duchess! That was deuced awkward! He did not recall or had not perhaps sufficiently studied her face. Maybe he had not seen what there was to be seen, but what he wished to see. Tatiana Nicholaievna's fresh young face had been transformed by his imagination into an image of unspeakable beauty and elegance. It would now be out of question to meet her again. With what eyes would she look at him now and he at her? She must shun him and would look at him with disgust.

Aliësha remembered his wound. The pain was less acute. He breathed more freely under the tight bandage. He noticed that he had no fever any longer and realized that he was certain to recover.

A slight noise in the ward, gay voices and whispers roused Aliësha from his thoughts and he opened his eyes.

Sister Tatiana had seated herself on a chair by his bed-stead. He knew her at once, but did not see her as she really was, a slender young girl with large kind grey eyes, like those of her father. Karpoff pictured her to himself as a beautiful fairy-tale Princess, whom he had worshipped before seeing her.

Her simple, worn grey petticoat dropped in folds from the chair. Her sympathetic face, framed from her forehead down to her chin by a white head-gear falling over her shoulders, bent over him as she smoothed his pillows, and smiled at him with a bashful smile.

"How do you feel, Karpoff?" she asked, calling him by his family name as was the habit at the hospital.

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"Splendid. The pain has disappeared. It's deuced fine now."

"Where did you get wounded? The Princess, our surgeon, tells me that you were wounded from a distance of thirty paces. Were you so close to the enemy? You saw their faces?"

"I very nearly captured a machine-gun," said Karpoff breathless with excitement. "If I had not been wounded I should have seized it with my own hands. Unluckily I was hit and I rolled over as if someone had struck me in the ribs. Then I started running and noticed that Barannikoff was already slashing a German and that Likhovidoff and Skatchkoff were dragging the machine-gun. Can you imagine, Your Imperial Highness, a German was fastened to a machine-gun by a chain. It's possible that he would have bolted if he could, but he couldn't."

"Don't call me Highness, call me Sister Tatiana," the Grand Duchess said, smiling.

Aliësha felt confused.

"Who's Barannikoff?" Tatiana Nicholaievna asked, by way of making Karpoff feel at his ease.

"Barannikoff is a Cossack of the Oost-Biëlo-Kalitvensk settlement. He's a brick, my word, Your Imp . . . Sister Tatiana," Karpoff hastily corrected himself, and feeling totally abashed, stopped short.

"Well, and what about Barannikoff?" the Grand Duchess asked.

"Barannikoff noticed that I was wounded and cried to me: 'Don't bother, Your Honour, I'll finish him off for you' and hit him with his bayonet right through the stomach. I saw it happen. The German collapsed. But I ought to give you an account from the very beginning. It was a fine battle."

"Well then begin from the very beginning if it does not tire you. Your chest does not ache?"

If anyone had told Aliësha that his life depended on his not giving his account, he would have nevertheless first told his tale and then have died with a happy smile, once he knew that the Tsar's daughter was cognizant of his deed of valour.

"Well you see," he said, "it was on the 11th September dur-

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ing the night. The fighting had gone on for two months, but not regular battles. We'd shoot and let them approach to a distance of about fifteen hundred paces, and then we'd retire. But this time orders were given not to retreat. Cartridges were forwarded to us, because we were very short of them. For five days running our division, besides two Cossack regiments and three battalions of infantry, had to repel the attacks of the enemy. Would you believe it, they attacked us three times a day and twice every night. They'd come up as close as six hundred paces, we'd pelt them with machine-guns and rifle fire and they'd retreat. On the 12th September the Commander of the division, General Sablin. . . ."

"Alexander Nicolaievitch?" the Grand Duchess inquired.

"Yes, Alexander Nicolaievitch."

"I know him well. I knew his dead wife and his children. His son was killed during a cavalry charge. How is he getting on?"

"He's a marvellous man. He's simply worshipped by the soldiers and the Cossacks. And he seems to love them all. When you come to him for an order he'll explain everything so clearly, so well and so circumstantially and finish by saying: 'Well, go now, and God bless you.' And with such an accent, as though God were really ready to help you. And with that very strict. At Kamen-Kachirsky Cossacks of another regiment sacked a Jewish shoemaker's shop. He had them tried by court-martial and sentenced them to death. And the general opinion was in his favour, because a Cossack must not pillage, a Cossack isn't a plunderer. And you know, Sister Tatiana, our division is always provided with everything, he thinks of everything and does everything. On the 12th of September, he gave orders that we should take Jeliesnitza. The second brigade, the Cossacks and Hussars had to form the front line. We, Cossacks, started from the front and the hussars went from the right flank."

The boy went on telling the whole story of the fight. When it was done the Grand Duchess said:

"Why, you're a hero, Karpoff!"

Triumphant loud bells tolled again in Karpoff's soul as they

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did during the victory and he felt warm and blissful at heart. He looked at Tatiana Nicholaievna with such adoring eyes that she felt abashed.

"What's your Christian name, Karpoff?" she said, "I'll pray for you."

"Aliësha."

"The same as my brother. I'll also call you Aliësha now. Will you let me? Why what's the matter?"

Aliësha was crying with excitement and bliss.

Among all the gradations of love, that of first love is the strongest and most acute. It's the more painful when it has not only no chance of attaining its end but has not even any hope of reciprocity. A first love of that description becomes a disease bordering on insanity. Unspeakable bliss brought about by some trifle, a stray ribbon picked up, a photograph given as a present, is often followed by suffering capable of inducing suicide, when the beloved turns a cold shoulder, flirts with a rival, or otherwise shows her indifference.

First love is disinterested. A pressure of the hand, a kiss, the proximity of the sweetheart during some game or dance afford more joy than possession itself. Special bliss lies hidden in disappointed passion, in its never ending ebullition, in incessant insinuations and allusions. First love, alone, pictures to itself the beloved as one indivisible integrity and all the deeds of the beloved are seen through a beautifying prism. Her frock, the style of dressing her hair, every minute article of her clothing are apt to provoke paroxysms of passion. She seems to have no defects whatever. And her empire is stronger when she is absent and a subject of dreams, when the imagination adorns her with physical and moral perfection, and deeds of valour are mentally accomplished for her sake.

Such was the first love that overcame Aliësha Karpoff, like a sudden illness, the moment Tatiana Nicholaievna had left the room. His love was the stronger because Tatiana Nicholaievna was a charming girl, with beautiful hair and fine eyes and was clothed in the sanctity of her noble lineage. She was the daughter of an Emperor. Not a single evil thought came to his mind

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in connection with her; there was absolutely no hope of any possible intimacy with her; and nothing remained for him but to love in silence and to suffer in his dreams.

Aliësha followed her with a hungry and excited gaze when she rose from the chair by his bed-side and left the room. Everything appertaining to her seemed beautiful and unlike anything he had seen before. Her waist, encircled by the white sash of her apron, seemed marvelously slender, her grey frock fell in wide folds, uncovering her well-shaped legs in transparent silk-stockings. Her low-heeled shoes just slightly rapped on the wooden floor and her gait was like that of a fairy. Aliësha still felt the hardly perceptible scent of her perfume, though it had already long since evaporated in the well-ventilated room.

He was not alone in the ward. Other wounded lay there besides himself. Opposite to him sat an elderly officer in a dressing-gown to which a St. George's cross was attached, and smoked nervously. His yellow face was gloomy and his head shook continually and against his will. Two beds further, quite close to the wall, lay a wounded officer, moaning quietly. By the sadly ironical smile of his thin face with protruding skull-bones, Aliësha recognized his travelling companion, Wertzinsky. Aliësha lay to one side, close to the window. He turned to the window, fearing lest someone should address him and dispel the beautiful enchantment which still prevailed in his mind after his conversation with the Grand Duchess. How he longed to be alone with his illusions and his dreams. Wide-boughed lime-trees and white-stemmed birches showed their golden autumn foliage through the large window-panes. Pink clouds swam gently along the pale sky, and Aliësha found pleasure in following the quiet flight of the clouds. Some short distance off, a three-storied building was visible and smoke rose from its chimney. The wind tore the smoke asunder, whirling it towards the sky and disseminating it in all directions, and like that smoke Aliësha's light and passing dreams escaped his mind and flew to upper regions.

"My beloved! My love, my darling. Soon you'll come again and seat yourself on that chair."

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He longed to kiss the chair on which she had sat, but he felt shy. He touched it with his hand, but the chair was cold and the straw of its tressed seat had not retained the warmth of her body.

In his dreams it seemed to him as though Tatiana Nicholaievna loved him with the same pure love and gave him her hands to kiss.

To his end Aliësha remembered that holy, beautiful day. If he had had the means, he would have bought a pretty little ring in the shape of a wedding ring with a precious stone and would have engraved in it the date of that memorable day. The twenty-third of September. She came up to him and brought him some flowers.

"There, you've been obedient and good," she said. "You can get up now and walk a little."

"It's you alone whom I've got to thank for my recovery," he muttered with dry lips.

"Why me?"

There was no one in the ward except Wertzinsky, who lay with his back turned.

"Why?—That I cannot explain to you, Tatiana Nicholaievna. You would be angry with me."

She was placing the flowers in a glass on the table and pouring water out of a decanter. She bent towards him. He saw her flushed face and her large, grey eyes attentively fixed on the water she was pouring, so as to avoid spilling it. Her fingers, which were holding the decanter had become pink. Her white neck showed above her grey blouse.

"Why should I be angry," she asked placing the decanter on the table. "Tell me what you had intended to say and did not dare."

"I wished to ask you a great favour."

"What is it?" she asked. She expected a request addressed to her as Grand Duchess, some petition to be transmitted to the Emperor, a money-matter or some special reward. As a rule nothing came of such petitions and they vexed her.

"I beseech you to let me kiss your hand."

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She laughed and stretched out her hand to him. He grasped it with both his and pressed it to his hot lips with such effusion that she shuddered but did not draw it back. He then turned her hand with his burning fingers and covered the palm with hot kisses.

"Come, that will do now," she said. "How strange you are!" And, swiftly bending towards him, she touched his burning forehead with her lips and instantly left the room.

Aliësha felt as though he could not remain lying any longer nor think of anything. He longed to sing and cry out his joy, to walk, jump or dance. He left his bed and began pacing the room.

"Wertzinsky! Casimir Casimirovitch!" he exclaimed. "Are you asleep?"

A sharp face turned his way and a burning gaze met his.

"What's the matter, Karpoff? What's up?"

"I feel inclined to smother you, Casimir Casimirovitch, do you hear? I'm so happy!"

"My hearty congratulations, but please, don't touch me. My wound is beginning to heal."

"Casimir Casimirovitch do you know what love is?"

Wertzinsky looked at him attentively.

"Come, come, young man, do you happen to be in love?"

Aliësha nodded affirmatively.

"Well, then you're done for. Young man, it's a fool only who can be in love in the present times."

"Casimir Casimirovitch, now tell me sincerely, don't you really know what love is?"

"Love and being in love are two different feelings."

"Well, call it being in love, it's all the same," Aliësha replied gaily, and seated himself on Wertzinsky's bed.

"Being in love means writing the initials of one's beloved in the sand: it's a foolish feeling and not worthy of a man," Wertzinsky went on. "As for me, young man, I've never in my life collected fair maidens' locks, nor have I worn them on my heart as talismans."

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Aliësha pictured to himself his joy if he possessed a curl of Tatiana Nicholaievna's and smiled blissfully.

"I see, young man, that you do not agree with me. Well, what's to be done. I consider it my duty, however, to warn you, for it's partly to you that I owe being in this exemplary hospital and on my way to recovery."

"And do you mean to say that you are not grateful to our Empress, our head-sister?"

"Not a bit, young man. She has not fulfilled the hundredth part of her duty towards me. All of them, the head-sister as well as her daughters, are, at the very least, hysterical women."

"How can you say such things!"

"It's the effect of degeneration."

Aliësha kept silent. He recalled the tall, healthy looking figure of the Empress, the beautiful Grand Duchess and was unable to understand how they could be looked upon as degenerate.

Wertzinsky seemed to have guessed his thoughts.

"Neither I," Wertzinsky went on, "nor the Captain, your neighbour, whose leg was amputated at the hip yesterday and who died this morning, were cared for by them: they did not even look at us. We were not sufficiently interesting. They take care of young, good-looking patients, who react on their sensuality and on their nerves. . . . It's an appendix to Rasputin, to that festering plague, which has contaminated the Imperial house on the eve of its fall."

"Who is Rasputin?" Aliësha inquired; and at the same moment he felt frightened at having put the question.

"Rasputin is the lover of an hysterical Empress and a scoundrel paid by the Emperor Wilhelm and who plays the part of a crazy saint. Rasputin is the beginning and the end of the revolution, its corner-stone and the last drop which is to overfill the cup of Russian autocracy," Wertzinsky went on, evidently admiring the completeness of his definition.

"I was told, however," Aliësha interposed, "that he is a common peasant."

"Well, and what of that?"

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"How could he rise to the intimacy of Her Majesty?"

"Eh, young man! He is endowed with what she needs," Wertzinsky continued. "Weigh your own self-confidence and if you find that you dispose of sufficient strength and charm, go and dare it and drop all this sighing of yours and the state of 'being in love.' Sentimentality is of no good here. The more impudently you act the more chance have you of success. One thing you may bear in mind and that is, that you will not find virginity: Rasputin has been before you."

"I don't believe you," Aliësha exclaimed tearfully. "And I don't believe in the possibility of a revolution! We Cossacks shall never allow it, as we didn't in 1905."

The young man hastily retreated from Wertzinsky and having reached his bed flung himself on it and lay looking with vacant eyes out of window.

IV

ALIËSHA could not get to sleep that night. His head was ablaze, his body suffered under the anguish of burning passion. His brain, excited against his will, was full of humble visions. He lay with eyes wide open, his head under his blanket and sobs shook his body.

It's a lie, a monstrous calumny, an invention of those dreadful men whom my father and my teachers always warned me against, an insolent calumny of the socialists. And yet Tatiana Nicholaievna, who even in his dreams seemed inaccessible, had now become accessible in his eyes. He remembered how a Grand Duchess had fallen in love and married a simple cavalry officer. History reminded him of Potemkin, Orloff and Rasumovsky. "Dare" was the word pronounced by Wertzinsky and which now echoed in his brain like an imperious command, and every pulse of his young body cried to him that he should dare.

His head burned as in a fever. His blood curdled in him so that his blanket seemed too heavy, and his pillow heated his face. He threw them away and lay, half naked, subdued by the stillness of the night and eager to catch its every sound. At last when the cool morning air came into the large window with

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a hardly perceptible smell of autumn, dry leaves, cold dew and ripe corn, Aliësha's lids closed heavily; and, overcome by fatigue, he fell into a deep, beneficent sleep and dreamt wonderfully beautiful and sweet dreams.

When he awoke, Sister Valentine was standing over him, smoothing his sheets and covering him with his blanket. Sister Rita brought him tea and lemon, and bread and butter.

"There, you see! You have recovered and have got strong again," Sister Valentine greeted him with an affable smile. "I'll ask the doctor to allow you to go out into the fresh air. Later on we'll send you for a month or two to a sanatorium in the Crimea and you'll forget all about your wound."

Rita moved on with her tea-tray, and Sister Valentine was also on the point of leaving, but Aliësha retained her by a wave of the hand and exclaimed, blushing:

"Sister Valentine! Sister Valentine!"

"What is it, my dear?" Sister Valentine asked kindly, and seated herself on the chair which had been occupied by her the day before.

"Sister Valentine, do all you can so as to enable me to stay on here. I don't need the Crimea. I'll recover much quicker here; and then I'll go straight to the front and . . . to death."

Aliësha stopped. His beautiful face was flushed with excitement and his large eyes looked imploringly at Sister Valentine's face.

"Tell me, Sister Valentine, tell me the whole truth. It's of the greatest importance to me. Who and what is Rasputin? And is there . . . is there anything. . . . Has he dared . . . and Her Imperial Highness the Grand Duchess Tatiana Nicholaievna."

Sister Valentine's face flushed. A spark of indignation flashed in her intelligent grey eyes.

"For shame, Karpoff! How can you believe such things. They are splendid girls who have devoted their youth to the wounded and are as pure as freshly fallen snow. They hate Rasputin and Rasputin has never approached them. Besides all that is rumoured about Rasputin and his influence on the

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head-sister is sheer invention. Rasputin has terrorized her by his witchcraft and his influence on the health of the heir apparent. She is to be pitied. You, officers, ought, with all your might, to fight against this dreadful calumny purposely spread about by the enemies of Russia with a view to destroying the country. Karpoff! here she comes! Look at her pure, honest beautiful eyes! Is it possible that you could for one single moment believe that those eyes were capable of falsehood? Here comes a girl worthy of worship."

"And I worship her."

Tatiana Nicholaievna came up to his bed.

"Tatiana Nicholaievna," Sister Valentine said, "Karpoff and I have just been speaking of you. You've gained a new admirer. You subjugate the hearts of our whole army."

"The greatest joy for me, Your Imperial Highness, would be to die for your sake."

Sister Valentine rose and Tatiana Nicholaievna took her seat.

One look at Tatiana Nicholaievna sufficed to banish all the terrors and dreams of the night. Honest and straightforward was the gaze of her round grey eyes, and her face shone with the brightness of youth; her smile showed her pearl-like teeth between her rosy lips.

Her white fingers buttered a roll for him. Aliësha sat up in bed and covering his chest and neck with his blanket—he had not yet slipped on his dressing-gown—proceeded to eat the roll as though it were holy bread.

"My chrysanthemums are fading," said Tatiana Nicholaievna, arranging the flowers. "I'll bring you fresh ones. How jolly that you are soon going over to the convalescent section. It's much gayer there. Olga will play to us on the piano and we'll play at 'rouble.' Do you know that game, Karpoff?"

"No, I don't," Karpoff answered.

"Oh, it's very simple. I'll teach you."

Tatiana Nicholaievna sat opposite to him, chattered kindly and listened to his stories about his regiment, the banner, the Cossacks and about the uncanny feeling that overcomes one when leading the advance patrol and strainingly expecting the

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dull report of rifle-shots and the whizz of bullets. Sister Valentine pulled up the blind and, standing by the window, looked across the yard at the opposite wing of the hospital.

"Excuse me, Tatiana Nicholaievna," she said. "I must be going. A transport of wounded from the south-western front is expected to arrive today."

"I'll go with you," Tatiana Nicholaievna rejoined. "Good-bye, Karpoff. Be a good boy. You know that you are dear to me."

She nodded to him. She had to pass by Wertzinsky. He awoke. His thin face and sharp, corpse-like nose protruded from the pillow and his eyes wore a gloomy and spiteful expression.

Tatiana Nicholaievna did not even look at him.

A dozen officers in clean, elegant dressing-gowns were assembled in the convalescent section of the hospital. The Empress and her four daughters, Sister Valentine, Sister Rita and several other sisters and hospital attendants were present.

The Grand Duchess Olga Nicholaievna had just stopped playing the piano. The rain pattered outside and drummed on the window-panes, but here, in the brightly illuminated dining room, one felt warm and cosy. Servants brought in tea, bread and sweets. Karpoff sat in a corner with Sister Rita Durnovo. A mutual passionate love towards the Imperial family had drawn Karpoff to Sister Rita.

"Our great-grandfather was Suvoroff"—Rita Durnovo, a tall and slim girl with large intelligent eyes, was saying. "Suvoroff's last will hangs above the beds of all of us, both brothers and sisters, and in it he says: 'I bequeath you unlimited devotion to His Majesty the Emperor and readiness to die for your Tsar and your mother-country.'"

"Yes, there's nothing to come up to that," said Aliësha. "Do you know, sister Rita, I've for ever so long been yearning to die on the battle-field. You must understand me; Sister Valentine does. . . . You'll soon hear that I have been killed. Promise then to tell Tatiana Nicholaievna that I was killed for her sake."

"You are in love with her," Rita whispered. "How I feel for

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you, Alexei Pavlovitch. You are right: it's impossible not to love her and that to such an extent as to die for her. She's a dream. I can assure you that I've entirely devoted myself to them all. I know nothing higher nor better than to serve them. Whatever happens, I'll remain true to them and never shall I abandon them, should it cost me my life."

"Do you think then that they are in danger?" Aliëssha asked, lowering his voice to a whisper.

"I can't tell, I don't know. But there are rumours about, and at times they make one feel so anxious.

"I'm beginning to dread the future. All the best men have fallen in Prussia and in Galicia for the sake of France. I've got a brother who is officer in the Life Guard sharp-shooter regiment and he tells me that he does not know his regiment any more. There are eighty percent. of new elements in it; military-school ensigns hurriedly promoted, students, schoolboys with none of the regimental traditions. And the same in all the other regiments. Reserve battalions of the guard are quartered here; I come across the officers and although I am young and inexperienced I notice the difference. It's shocking to hear the way they speak of the Emperor and to see how they behave in the train and in the tram-cars. What if that should be the beginning of the end? But never, never shall I leave them whatever might happen. My great-grandfather bequeathed me unlimited fidelity and with it shall I die."

"Rita," Olga Nicholaievna called to her in her sonorous contralto. "What are you whispering about with Karpoff? Come and join our game of 'rouble.'"

The officers and the Emperor's daughters seated themselves at a table.

"Karpoff, come here," Tatiana Nicholaievna cried, and Aliëssha felt his hot blood rush through his veins and blushed to the roots of his hair. He took a seat by her side.

All the players held their hands under the table. One young lieutenant of a guard infantry regiment, wounded in the hand and not quite recovered from his wound watched attentively the expressions of the faces and the movements of the players so

as to guess in whose hand the players purposely pushed the cards were passing on the rouble to the guesser.

"Karpoff, you've got it," he said, both hands and showed his cards.

Aliëssha knew that the rouble Tatiana Nicholaievna's soft smile was giving to a silent agreement, lest the guesser should not lose the chance of again having the charming hands had warmed. Nicholaievna sat with throbbing heart, she had suddenly attained for her importance.

"Maria Nicholaievna, you are quite a child still, the

burst out laughing and struck his face.

Aliëssha kept his hand in the warm rouble lay between her knee and felt the texture of the cloth.

The small hand with the warm and kept it long in a friendly pulsation of her every finger, of unspeakable bliss.

"Coppel, haven't you got tired with not having success?"

"Let's drop this game. Better go in for thought-reading." Aliëssha's hand and left the table.

The Empress sat in a chair.

"It's only here amidst the how lively my Tatiana is, and such high spirits. And how very well brought up. Your father had been killed in

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"Yes, just about a year ago, at the river Nida."

"Poor boy! How many orphans this war has made. Oh, Sister Valentine, one must put an end to this massacre. We aren't strong enough to fight them."

Sister Valentine kept silent and dropped her head on her bosom.

"We must first be victorious, Your Imperial Majesty," she said in an undertone, plucking the edge of her white apron.

V

THOSE two months had for Aliëssha meant being roasted on slow fire. Daily interviews, tender looks, pressure of hands, little presents of sweets, flowers or books, long intimate conversations, in which, however, love was never mentioned. She'd tell him about her romps with Alexei, whom all the sisters adored, or of one of Anastasia Nicholaievna's practical jokes a short while ago, during a journey. Her sister had climbed in to the luggage-net of the car, had wrapped herself in a plaid and had poured drops of water out of a phial on the head of an old brigadier General who was accompanying them, much to the confusion of Tatiana, Olga and Maria. He on his side would talk about the Cossacks and their village life, about Novotcherkask. Pictured by him the Cossacks grew to be fairy-tale heroes. His narratives were imbued with the love that consumed his heart.

"How glad I am that they are such as you describe them," said Tatiana Nicholaievna, "because I've been often told that they fight badly and go in for marauding."

Then Aliëssha would tell her all about his regiment, about the new blue banner embroidered in silver, about his horse. She was madly fond of horses, and loved to read books in which horses were described and when the tale was sad she cried and was angry with the author. If it happened that she could not visit the hospital she sent a small note to him through Sister Valentine with a tender greeting.

Sometimes he obtained permission from her to kiss her hand. She'd give it to him, laughingly, but would instantly pull it back.

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He more than once reminded her of the memorable 23rd of September. She would then ask him what had happened on that eventful day, and he'd blush and timidly answer:

"I was so happy on that day. I thought I would be unable to survive my joy. You kissed me!"

"Oh yes, I remember," and Tatiana Nicholaievna's face took a serious expression. "I was so sorry for you."

"On that day I gave my oath, that I would die for your sake."

Tatiana Nicholaievna thought that officers must die in war-time, or there would be no victory. She looked at Aliëscha seriously and a feeling of pity overcame her. "It's his duty, however," she thought, "and his happiness consists in dying for his mother-country."

"Forget all about it," she said.

"But do you remember how you kissed me?"

She did not remember, but knew that she would hurt his feelings by owning it and replied: "Yes, I remember. You are good, Karpoff, and I wish you always to be good. Love me. It is a comfort for me to know that men of your sort love me. But don't think of silly things. A kiss is a silly thing. Don't forget the 23rd of September though. Always remember that date. If ever you pass through difficult times remember that I am fond of you, that my prayers are with you and life will seem easier."

He was conscious that to love Tatiana Nicholaievna to such an extent was folly. He knew that never would he be capable of loving anyone else, and that his life was done for, because he could never hope to see his love reciprocated. And he vowed to die. At any other time he would have committed suicide in one of those attacks of unrepaid passion—now, however, he was certain of finding worthy death and quietly awaited his fate. What he had achieved at Jeliesnitza did not seem to him a deed of heroism any longer. Now he was prepared to some deed of exceptional valour, which would either bring on death or give him the possibility of returning to her with the St. George's cross, of returning with the laurels of a hero, worthy of her love.

Time took its course and the hour of parting crept on.

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Aliëshsha intended to visit his mother for one day and then return to the front to join his regiment.

"Karpoff," Sister Valentine said to Aliëshsha, when, after having sent the hospital orderly to the station with his things, he was on the point of leaving and was putting on his overcoat, "Sister Tatiana wishes to see you. Go into the reception-room."

Karpoff's heart quavered. He threw his coat on his bed and followed Sister Valentine.

"Here he is, our fugitive. He insists on going to the front though he has not entirely recovered yet," said Sister Valentine, as she opened the door and pushed Karpoff in. The door closed behind him.

Tatiana Nicholaievna was alone. The polished floor was lighted by the slanting rays of the setting autumn sun.

The garden-trees, which here and there had preserved their yellow, red and brownish leaves, stood motionless outside the window. Horses' hoofs resounded on the frozen highroad.

"I wished to say farewell to you," Tatiana Nicholaievna began in a tremulous voice, "mamma asked me to transmit to you her blessing. She can't receive you personally but she sends you this cross and this Holy Testament."

Tatiana Nicholaievna's grey eyes grew serious. She crossed Aliëshsha with the sign of the cross and passed the chain of the cross over his neck. Her face and hands were quite close to his, and his heart throbbed so that it seemed to him as though he heard its pulsations. She placed her hands on his shoulders and said: "Farewell, my dear. God bless and protect you." She reached her hand out to him and the kiss with which he touched it was a kiss of passion. His hot lips burned it and Tatiana Nicholaievna quietly pulled her hand out of his and looked at him with dismay.

"Don't forget me," she said slipping a ring with a red stone from her finger.

"Read," she said.

On the inner circle of the ring the words "Sister Tatiana, 23rd September 1915" stood engraved.

"Let me put it on your finger." She slipped it on and once

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more gave him her hand to kiss. Again he pressed his lips to it and she felt the tears that dropped from his eyes.

"Come, come, that will do," she said kissing him gently on the eyes. "Brace up and show that you're a man," she said, shaking him firmly by the hand.

"Good-bye," she said and left the room.

Aliësha staggered to a chair by the window and sat down. Tears streamed down his cheeks. At that moment only did he realize that never again would he see that face and hear that beloved voice. The short dream of happiness would return no more and nothing lay in store for him but the last crown—death.

VI

THE men of the reserve infantry regiment of the Guard were called to drill. The barracks could not hold the entire supplementary reserves. The beds had been shoved together, all the halls and gymnasiums were full of men, so that drill had to be done outside on the wooden pavement of the Morskaya street. The soldiers wore capes and some wore high shaft-boots, others Austrian lace-boots. The head-gear consisted of grey sheep-skin caps. There was a damp thaw, with drizzly rain which penetrated to the skin and made the wooden pavement as slippery as a skating-rink. The soldiers marched with gloomy faces, slipped and fell. There were too few guns for the men and the two guns that fell to the lot of each company were leant against the wall of the porch and served each man separately. The passers-by were in the soldiers' way and the soldiers interfered with the traffic of the passers-by. Part of the latter were moved by the sight of these soldiers being drilled in the streets, and looked upon this as a sign of certain victory, others on the contrary could hardly hide their indignation.

"Why on earth," they said, "do they garrison such a lot of soldiers at Petrograd. They ought to be sent to the front and taught in the field how to build trenches and to run from trench to trench instead of this perpetual saluting, presenting arms and parade drill," some of the passers-by remarked.

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Two ensigns who had found shelter under the porch of the big house, smoked cigarettes and chatted, leaving drill to the sergeant. The battalion had been placed under the command of an active-service officer, sent from the regiment at the front but he never came to drill. He did not himself exactly know whether he had been sent on leave or to command the reserve battalion.

For two hours the drill had consisted in teaching the men to salute and to answer properly. The men defiled before the platoon-sergeant, who had each man stop before him and salute in answer to his greeting in various capacities in the military hierarchy.

"Answer, Robzoff, as though you were saluting in reply to an army corps Commander's greeting of: 'Welcome, my friend!'"

"My respects, Your Excellency!"

"It's not quite that. There's not enough go in it. The army corps Commander requires more accentuation on the Exc . . . You can swallow the ending of the word but must give more weight to the first syllable; well, let's hear it again—welcome, my friend!"

The ensigns exchanged glances and the younger of the two—Knoop, a former student of the law-faculty looked at his wrist watch and said to his companion—Khartchenko: "I guess it's time to stop this idiotic business."

"Perhaps we might just as well," Khartchenko replied.

Khartchenko was quite young, a mere schoolboy. Here in the regiment he was in command of a company of two hundred and fifty men but was continually under some one's influence and was always afraid of somebody. He feared and respected the junior ensign Knoop because the latter ostentatiously wore the university sign; he was afraid of the sedate and gloomy sergeant Mikhaïloff with his St. George's cross and of the wide-awake private Korjikoff who did not recognize discipline, and above all he trembled before his battalion Commander the young and smart-looking Captain Savelieff in his well-cut cloth tunic, with any amount of decorations including St. Vladimir's mili-

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tary cross. Savelieff appeared from time to time and found fault with everything.

"Mikhaïloff!" Khartchenko cried. "Stop the drill."

Mikhaïloff called the platoon together and appointed Korjikoff to lead the men with songs to the barracks.

The soldiers began singing a new song which sounded nothing like real Russian music. The words were sentimental and spoke of abandoned home and family, of going to certain death and not to conquest and victory over the enemy. That song made the heart feel sick, as Mikhaïloff said, and yet he did not succeed in having it changed. It was sung everywhere and had been introduced by those ensigns whom Mikhaïloff disliked and despised. "That song's enough to make you bolt," he once said to Korjikoff. "That's not a soldier's song. Neither the Tsar nor our mother-country comes in. There's no rhythm in it. A song must have life in it and spur you on, whereas this one is a perpetual whine with its everlasting 'farewell.' You should sing real Russian songs full of life, of pluck and of boldness."

"I don't know those songs, sergeant. Sing them yourself," Korjikoff would reply, standing respectfully before his sergeant but with an impudent look.

"Sing yourself!" There was the hitch: neither Mikhaïloff nor his assistants of the active service were singers and they knew little about the words. So they addressed themselves to the ensign, who likewise knew nothing in that line.

"You just wait until we are at the front," Mikhaïloff grumbled to himself as he followed the platoon.

At the thought of the front he felt still more gloomy. "Who'll teach them there?" he thought with bitterness. "There's not one single one of the former contingent of officers left: nothing but young and inexperienced men. They don't know how to approach the soldiers. Is it the proper thing for a soldier to wear a love-lock like a girl, as Korjikoff does with ensign Knoop's permission. And who's Knoop? A German or a Jew for all I know. Maybe he *is* a Jew; and he owns, himself, to being a student. Good Lord! After two hours' drill they've

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got sick of it, standing as they did under cover of the porch. And one calls this a regiment of the Guards!"

"March in step, you son of a bitch!" Mikhaïloff cried in rage and pushed one of the rear soldiers with such force that he staggered.

"Mikhaïloff," Knoop remarked from the curb, in the tone of a schoolmaster, "I'd request you not to forget yourself. Drop your police habits."

The two years that Mikhaïloff had been in the reserve he had served in the Petrograd police and his former superiors had approved of it on the plea that he had done well in remaining in service where discipline was required. And what now?

When they were back in the barracks Khartchenko and Knoop called Mikhaïloff into the regimental office.

"Mikhaïloff," Khartchenko began, "I'm not at all satisfied with the way in which you drill the soldiers in the yard. Tell me candidly, is that what you do at the front?"

Mikhaïloff kept silent, gazing bluntly at the clean-shaven young face of the ensign and trying hard to look upon him as upon an officer and a superior, and not as a schoolboy.

"Now tell me, Mikhaïloff," Knoop put in in his shrill uncertain voice, "how about this saluting, eh? It's quite over-rated and should be done away with. It belongs to the era of Nicholas I! And then your way of treating the soldiers! In the present day the soldier is educated, we have six men in our platoon with university culture, and you go on using bad language!"

"One moment, Boris Matveievitch," Khartchenko resumed. "Tell me, Mikhaïloff, what did you do at the front?"

"We shot, thrust, hit with the butt-end of our guns, built trenches."

"Consequently what is required of a soldier in warfare?"

"To begin with, the soldier must understand discipline."

"That's all very well. But the chief point is: how has the soldier to act with regard to the enemy?"

"Because without discipline the army becomes a wild horde, goes in for plundering, flees before the enemy," Mikhaïloff went on.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"Very good, but you just mentioned that the soldier must learn to build trenches, to shoot and thrust," Knoop said insinuatingly. "Well, that's what you've got to teach them."

"Quite so," Mikhaïloff muttered still more gloomily.

"There, you admit it yourself. So please teach them military art instead of useless marching and other rubbish," Knoop rejoined pompously.

"Your Honour," Mikhaïloff addressed Khartchenko in a voice of entreaty, "how am I to teach them entrenching on wooden pavements and without spades. How are they to learn rifle-shooting and bayonet-thrusting with one gun only to the whole platoon. . . . I try to teach them discipline and you don't even allow me to have their hair shorn in military style. How's that, Your Honour? After all it's for warfare that they are being drilled."

Khartchenko felt confused and did not answer at once.

"All right, Mikhaïloff," he resumed, "I'll have a talk on the matter with the battalion Commander."

"What do you want, Korjikoff?" Khartchenko inquired.

A young, good-looking, clean-shaven man with hair parted on the side and a big lock on the forehead appeared at the door of the office. He was clad in a well-fitting, cloth soldier's tunic and broad trousers evidently from some good tailor and looked impudently at the ensigns.

"Allow me to speak to you," said the young man.

"All right. Mikhaïloff, you can go."

"Come in Korjikoff."

VII

AFTER the murder of Colonel Karpoff the young man then known as Modjalevsky, now as Korjikoff, had run over to the Austrians. He obtained his liberty owing to the valuable information he gave to the Austrian staff and made his way through to Sommerfeld in Switzerland. He doubted that he would find any members of the faction there but to his great surprise all the seven leaders including Korjikoff and Brodmann were at their posts. Their fighting staff was established in

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Lubovin's house. The conference of the Internationalists had just taken place in Zimmerwald and the formula proposed by Lenin had been accepted:

"From the point of view of the working class of all nationalities in Russia the defeat of the Imperial Russian monarchy and of its armies would be the least evil."

That formula had raised discussions amidst the emigrants, as it was considered too stiff. The members of the seven were aware that Lenin had received important sums of money from the German government and that fact caused many to disavow him. Fedor Fedorovitch was of the number. Thereupon Lenin called them social-traitors and formed an intimate working circle of members entirely faithful to him and mostly Jews.

Brodmann belonged to that group. He summoned young Korjikoff to visit him, had a long talk with him, forwarded a detailed report on his activity to the central committee and communicated the following decision to Victor:

"The German government has established a special branch in Sweden for the propaganda amongst the armies of the anti-German coalition, and we must use that branch for our work tending towards a universal revolution. You are to go there and then to Russia, where you will promote socialistic propaganda, organize strikes, revolutionary riots, disorganize the government functionaries, and lay the foundation of civil war, disarmament and the cessation of this sanguinary war. Such is the general plan of the German government, which coincides with the program of our faction. You have been appointed leader of the 'seven' who are to act in Petrograd. You must come in touch with the following members of the Duma: Petrovsky, Badaïeff, Moorakoff, Samoïloff and Shagoff.

Brodmann laughed nervously.

"You'll notice that they are all of them Russians, so you need not fear."

"I don't care who they are: I have no such prejudices," said Korjikoff.

"You will be able, owing to our connections, to join the army under your real name. Your mission is to deprave and de-

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

moralize the soldiers to such an extent as to make them shun the dangers of the front. Demoralize them everywhere in the hospitals, cinemas and theatres. We have now sufficient means at our disposal and public opinion on our side. Everything's ready! Repeat by word and in writing and impress the one watch-word: The only martyr in warfare and the only hero is—the soldier. Raise the soldier and crush the officer.”

“How are we to set to work?” Korjikoff remarked. “There are not many like me to be found.”

Brodmann again laughed.

“Don't you worry, comrade, the entire Russian educated classes are sure to aid you. They are a herd of cowardly sheep and it will suffice to scatter them to the ranks of the army to see it decomposed by them, as by a noxious microbe. Make a laughing stock of the officers in whatever way you choose, either by anecdotes or songs or plays, so that the rank of a General shall seem a disgrace and that of a soldier—an honour. Play on the public admiration of the soldier's merits and gradually form new soldiers with nothing military about them. Await your chance. As soon as the majority is sick of war, we shall aim a blow with all our might along the whole front and shall publicly proclaim our watch-word of: ‘Down with the war! Peace to the huts and warfare to the palaces! Long live the working-class!’ Raise criminals to heroes and get the criminal elements to side with you. Our tactics are to put the Government Duma and the public leaders in opposition to the Emperor, at the same time raising enmity amidst the public leaders. Inculcate dishonesty of their capacities in the public mind, suggest to the mob that the soldiers and workmen are the only honest men in Russia, and choose among them the most demoralized black-guards. We'll see whose then will be the victory, and who will prove to be the strongest: those whose hearts burn with love or those whose hearts are full of hate. The Christians preach that their lives must be piloted by three virtues: Faith, Hope and Charity, Charity taking the lead. Our system consists in sowing unbelief, despair and hate, hate above all. Let us see whether Christ will hold out.”

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Victor was delighted. That was the propaganda that pleased him best. After that moon-light night when he had murdered Loukianoff and Karpoff, a sensual feeling of bliss filled him at the thought of shedding human blood. "Only a short while ago lived a certain Colonel Karpoff, loved and respected by all, who was at the head of a number of men and now he is no more and will never return and that's my doing. I am he who brings death and destruction. What do those attain who serve God and the angels? Nothing but poverty and famine. I'll serve Satan and we shall see who is the stronger—the evil spirit or the angel."

Korjikoff got through to Sweden via Germany and thence proceeded to Petrograd, where he succeeded without any difficulty in enlisting in the reserve battalion of the Guards. With important means at his disposal he plunged into the fulfilment of Brodmann's program.

VIII

"I've come to you, Your Honour, in the name of the whole platoon," Korjikoff began in an off-hand way, "to complain of the snake. You will have yourself noticed the way he swore at Kotoff and hit him this morning. We apply to you, who are a man of culture, because we can stand such treatment no longer."

"I promise you, Korjikoff, to put an end to it," said Khartchenko.

"Your Honour, the whole platoon insists on Mikhailoff being punished."

"I'll consult on the matter with the battalion Commander."

"The platoon, Your Honour, is likewise discontented with the mess. We were short of meat for dinner. The soldiers ask permission to go to their respective homes for their meals. Most of them have families, so that they are provided for at home."

"I'll see to that question likewise in concurrence with the battalion Commander," Khartchenko answered languidly.

"The comrades likewise declare, Your Honour, that they wish to be authorized to go to the cinema and to have town leave up to late hours."

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"That I positively cannot authorize," Khartchenko said, "that's prohibited by the statutes of internal service."

"They go all the same," Korjikoff rejoined. "As for the statutes of internal service, they are not observed by the higher officers."

"How's that? What do you mean?"

"Do the statutes allow that the men should lie on the floor like so many pigs? Our barrack-room is meant for one hundred beds, whereas two hundred and fifty men are quartered in it. The mattresses have not been distributed in full and there are not sufficient blankets. At night the barracks are a regular hell: it's hardly possible to breathe."

Khartchenko knew that all this was true. He had more than once made a report on the subject to Savelieff, who had hopelessly waved his hand. "What am I to do?" he would say, "when we are supposed to quarter four thousand in all and twelve thousand have been sent to us. Where am I to place them? There are too few kitchens. I have written to all the authorities and have received no answer from anywhere. It has come to minister Polivanoff's ears, but he only laughed, as though it could not be otherwise."

"You can go, Korjikoff," said Khartchenko, "and you can rest assured that all that's in our power will be done. Now go to drill."

Notwithstanding the cold February day it was stuffy in the company's quarters. There was a sour smell of worn under-clothing and dirty foot-wraps. A genuine fog prevailed in the barracks owing to the damp cloaks and boots. The air echoed with the soldiers' loud voices, and the barracks impressed one as being workmen's and not soldiers' quarters.

When the ensigns made their appearance in the barracks no command of "attention" was given. As they passed by, some of the soldiers stood aside and a few of them rose from their seats. Neither Khartchenko nor Knoop were shocked. They had no understanding of the outward discipline which was considered so necessary by the officers of the old staff. The soldiers answered with deference, were never rude and they con-

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sidered that quite sufficient. Here and there outsiders were to be seen in the barracks. Two young sailors, surrounded by soldiers, sat on a bed with a map of the military operations spread out before them and newspapers scattered about.

"What are you doing here, my friends," Khartchenko asked them.

"We have come to visit our pals," one of the sailors answered.

"They've come to me, Your Honour," said a volunteer.

Khartchenko and Knoop continued their round. In one corner of the barracks a Sister of Charity and an elderly, respectably dressed civilian sat surrounded by soldiers. In answer to the inquiry who they were a pale soldier said that the sister had tended him at the hospital and had come to visit him and that the civilian was her father. Again Khartchenko did not protest, not knowing how to act. The street pushed itself forward into the barracks and the barracks tended towards the street and neither Khartchenko nor Knoop knew how to stop it in either case.

As soon as Khartchenko and Knoop had gone to a distant part of the barracks, the sailor carefully unfolded the map and proceeded to show it to the soldiers.

"How do you explain that, comrade? That looks like treason," said a young soldier fixing the sailor with his grey eyes.

"Yes, comrades, sheer treason," the sailor rejoined calmly.

The soldiers around heaved a deep sigh, and a threatening silence set in.

"Those Generals and officers, comrades, who were to have forwarded the munitions to Krakow had been bribed. Thus, instead of besieging Krakow, our troops had to retreat and it turned out that we were short of ammunition and cartridges. Orders were given to forward them with the greatest speed, special trains were formed for the purpose and just then not one single train was allowed to pass because the Empress was on her way to the Supreme Headquarters at Mohyleff."

"What for?" asked a young, dark-bearded soldier.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"To visit her husband evidently; she probably longed to see him again," ventured a short, wide-awake soldier.

The sailor stopped his narrative for a few seconds, exchanged glances with his companion and resumed sadly and calmly:

"No, comrade, she goes there by order of her lover Rasputin, who, on the other hand, receives instructions from the Emperor Wilhelm."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed several voices in the crowd.

"So he, likewise, has sold himself," asked the first soldier.

"Undoubtedly," the sailor answered.

"They have all sold themselves. What's the good then of shedding blood if all the upper classes are engaged in bartering with our peasant-blood?" the crowd murmured.

At the other end the sister of charity was distributing sweet cakes to the soldiers and talking to them in an insinuating voice.

"Eat, my friends, eat in remembrance of the poor soldier who died last night in my arms. He was so good and compassionate, and all he described was so horrible. They were engaged in a battle. The bullets whizzed past and an officer says to him: 'You lie down in front of me and protect me against the bullets!' Isn't that awful? And the officer, it seems, was dead drunk."

"Where on earth do they get the vodka from!" said a stolid chap with a black moustache.

"Where! Why the bosses can obtain whatever they choose!" replied a broad-shouldered, freckled, clean-shaven soldier.

Korjikoff paced the barracks with his hands in his pockets, exceedingly pleased with himself. He was busy getting together a party for the cinema and offering to lend money without repayment to those who could not afford to go.

"Attention, stand up," commanded a sergeant in a smart brand-new coat with a white varnished belt and a short sabre.

All the men stood up. The elderly gentleman, the sister of charity and the two sailors instantly disappeared.

An officer of about twenty-seven came in with hurried steps. He was dressed in a clean soldier's cloak, of pre-war cut and a winter cap with a coloured band. It was Captain Savelieff, the Commander of the reserve battalion.

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He had lately married and considered his present assignment as being on leave. He therefore seldom appeared at the barracks before eleven o'clock to give directions and attend to order. The rest of his time he spent with his young wife in the whirl of Petrograd entertainments, in paying calls, in parties, in visiting theatres of every description and "cabarets" which had just come into fashion. His whole aspect breathed pluck, discipline and smartness. In his presence all the men pulled themselves together, lifted their chins and put on a lively and bold demeanour, as Mikhaïloff had taught them to.

"Greetings to you, boys," Savelieff cried in a brisk voice.

The reply thundered in the heavy, stuffy barrack air.

The Captain greeted Khartchenko and Knoop and, accompanied by Mikhaïloff, began the round of the company.

"Why are the capes lying about, why haven't they been hung up?" he remarked to Khartchenko.

"The men have only just returned from drill, Your Honour, and have not yet had time to put away their things," answered Mikhaïloff, respectfully.

Savelieff turned towards the latter with a smile and said kindly:

"Ah, how are you, Mikhaïloff? How are you getting on, my friend? Is your wound quite healed?"

Mikhaïloff and Savelieff both belonged to the real Guards. They had known one another and had shared service on the Mokotovsk battle-field. They understood one another and Mikhaïloff was much dearer to Savelieff than Khartchenko and Knoop, who did not appreciate military drill and would not recognize it as being part of the military science, leading to victory. Savelieff often said to himself, that it would have been much better had Mikhaïloff been an officer and a company Commander, instead of those two young ensigns so little imbued with the tradition of the battalion.

"What's that?" Savelieff asked severely, as he stopped in front of Korjikoff. "I ask you, ensign Khartchenko, is that a soldier or a whore? That uniform? That lock of hair? A regular street-whore!"

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"I'd ask you not to insult me. Your Honour," Korjikoff remarked calmly and in a loud voice.

"What? Silence! How dare you! Have him shorn!"

"Please, don't raise your voice in that way and don't insult me," Korjikoff repeated, but the Captain had resumed his round.

"It's I who gave him the permission," said Knoop. "I did not think it mattered much and it gives him pleasure."

"Free-thinkers' abomination," muttered Savelieff as he passed into the office. "How can one allow such things! And what an impudent snout! Mikhaïloff keep your eye on that blackguard."

"It's real hell with them now, Your Honour. Outsiders come regularly to the barracks every day, Sisters of Charity and what not. Heaven only knows who they are! It's impossible to maintain any discipline. Towards evening they leave the barracks in crowds and there's no holding them back. If you make a remark, you hear rowdy answers; they swear at you and call you a policeman. I can't make out what's happened, Your Honour. That Korjikoff deserves court-martial: he's a regular blackguard."

"Ensign Khartchenko, have the company fall in!" said Savelieff.

Five minutes later, after he had convinced himself by the silence that now reigned in the company's quarters, and by the numerously repeated command of: "Fall into line" and "attention" that the company was ready, he went into the barracks.

In the narrow passage between the beds and the windows two hundred and fifty men were standing in two ranks. Though above middle-size Captain Savelieff was about a head shorter than the right flank platoon. He experienced a pleasant feeling as he went by those tall fellows. However, their want of drill, their carelessly worn shirts and loosely hanging belts, the irregularity of their hair-dressing showed Savelieff that they were far from being real soldiers, and that the two months of drill they had gone through had not advanced them much. Want of discipline was noticeable everywhere. He had twelve hundred

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men in his battalion and all of the same stamp as those of Khartchenko's company.

"How can you behave as you do, my good fellows," he said. "We are in the midst of the most cruel war. The enemy is overpowering us. They are anxiously waiting for reinforcement at the front. In what state will you appear? Who are these outsiders who come to see you? Maybe German spies, who wish to demoralize you! You must be prepared to fulfil your sacred duty."

He repeated what he had said in the other companies. He himself had no faith in what he said because he knew that it was impossible to regenerate the men by speeches and persuasion. It would be quite different if one could bring them away from these surroundings to some twenty miles from the position, provide them with arms and, in batches of twenty men, teach them field-exercise! It was, however, for his superiors to decide whether it was rational to keep two hundred and fifty thousand young soldiers garrisoned in Petrograd in the midst of town-perversity and to teach them drill on street-pavements, without rifles, spades, or hand grenades, etc. His duty was summed up in doing what he could.

After delivering his speech Savelieff commanded: "at ease," but perceiving by the noise that ensued, that Khartchenko's company did not realize what "at ease" meant, he at once commanded "attention." He had to choose two sentinels of honour and singers for the charity-ball organized for that evening by Countess Paltoff.

After having completed that mission and noted the family names of the men he had picked out, and having instructed them to repair without delay to the quarters of the first company, Savelieff retired.

Hardly had he left when the company without awaiting the command, broke ranks.

Khartchenko and Knoop also turned homeward.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

IX

THAT "cabaret" ball in which the leading Petrograd actors and actresses were to appear had long before been planned on a large scale by Countess Natalie Paltoff for the benefit of the families of her husband's men fallen on the battle-field. She had done her utmost to collect as many officers of the regiment for that day as possible and had succeeded in obtaining leave for them, profiting by the regiment being in reserve. The best-looking and tallest men of the reserve battalion had been picked out and dressed in the pre-war parade uniform to stand in double line on both sides of the wide marble staircase leading to the Countess's apartment. The complete regimental band specially sent to the reserve battalion was likewise in brilliant parade uniform. By amusing themselves for the benefit of the families of the slain they did their best to forget about the war and to recall the former undisturbed time of elegant reviews, of disciplined soldiers and rousing music.

One of the members of the Imperial family, the Commander of the cavalry division, the young General "à la suite" Sablin, General Pestretzoff and his Chief-of-Staff, General Samoïloff and several noted officials were expected to be present.

Preobrajenskaïa was to dance and the Roumanian band of Goolesco was to play. Knoop was expected to recite and sing to the accompaniment of a guitar and the lady of the house had prepared some up-to-date songs and frivolous music-hall ditties. Isa Kremer had promised to come from Moscow for the event.

Despite the food shortage that had already set in, a magnificent supper had been ordered and the Countess had succeeded, owing to high patronage, in obtaining champagne and other expensive foreign wines.

The Countess, Princess Repnin, Countess Valerskaïa and old Matzneff, now chairman of the town and country union, had during a whole month prepared this elegant "cabaret" ball, which was to be the talk of the capital. The cost of organisation, of the artistic program representing soldiers in parade uniforms, of the scenery, the supper, the wine, the remuneration

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of the artists and other expenses were such that they alone would have formed a much larger provision for fallen soldiers' families than the profit counted upon from the select number of guests invited by special cards. Countess Paltoff knew, however, that no one would sacrifice the sum required without the attraction of food, drink and entertainment, that such was the custom; and, besides, the ball, as such, interested her far more than the unfortunate families.

The entertainment was to begin at eight p.m. but the guests only began to appear towards nine. Count and Countess Paltoff and a group of regimental officers greeted the guests at the top of the staircase. The Countess wore a rich evening-dress and her hair had been dressed by the first hairdresser of the capital. She looked very smart and handsome with her white neck and arms.

The officers appeared in new-fashioned tunics with glittering epaulets and decorations. Shortly the tall drooping figure of a General in khaki shoulder-straps and with his sabre on a khaki belt, appeared on the first flight of stairs whereupon the regimental adjutant made a sign to the band, which struck up the regimental march.

"I am happy to see you in good health," said the General in a hoarse voice as he kissed Countess Paltoff's hand. "Your looks are daily improving. It's such a comfort to find rest here after all the anxieties of the war."

He was followed by Sablin, who entered the ball-room clad in an elegant tunic of pre-war cut, adorned with the St. George's cross and aide-de-camp shoulder-bands, looking still young in spite of his close cropped hair which was getting grey and his deeply tanned face.

He bowed to the Countess and to the black-bearded General.

"Ah, Sablin," the latter exclaimed, affably stretching out his broad hand, "what a charitable deed the Countess has undertaken. The number of orphan tears she will wipe away owing to this magnificent party! How little elegance and luxury we have seen during the past eighteen months. Even the parade-

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

uniforms of our famous Nth regiment seem to us an anachronism."

The Generals and officers in the ball room rose and bowed to the black-bearded General. The ladies eyed him through their glasses.

"How old he has become," said a good-looking sister of charity in an elegant short khaki frock to General Samoïloff who stood by.

"It's not easy for him fighting on two fronts, Liubov Matveievna."

"Do you think he is fighting?" remarked the sister, looking at Samoïloff with a coquettish smile.

"Undoubtedly," Samoïloff replied.

"My impression was that he was drifting with the stream. Do you know Nicholai Zakharovitch, all these people are not human beings, Russians, living in the capital at the time of the greatest war, but living factions. With us and against us. Each one of them belongs to a platform and only exists for its sake."

"And what platform do you belong to, Liubov Matveievna?" asked Samoïloff with a smile.

"I? My motto is: 'Live and let live.' Since my husband left me, I was obliged to find some occupation. To take a lover or to ask for a divorce means to lower one's self. I chose another path and you see how everyone respects me."

"I to begin with! May I hope to win your favour?"

"If you behave yourself and give up looking at me with such eyes, that's a thing I can't stand. With me '*les affaires sont les affaires*.'"

A dark-blue velvet curtain with a gold fringe at the bottom was drawn aside, and ensign Knoop appeared on the stage. In his wide skirted khaki tunic, flaring breeches and yellow puttees, his hair carefully plastered to his temples, he looked anything but officer-like. He produced the impression of an actor badly made up.

"How on earth had he managed to join the regiment? How could he have risen to the rank of officer? How had he succeeded in pushing himself?" were the thoughts that passed

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through Count Paltoff's and the active service officers' heads, as they looked at him.

Meanwhile Knoop, pacing to and fro in front of the foot-lights in an off-hand way with his guitar, waited till complete silence had been established among the spectators, whereupon, imitating the sound of the drum by knocking the guitar with his knuckles, he announced curtly :

"The soldiers are coming!"

He described poetically and with talent the feelings of a child, of a woman and of an old man standing at a window and watching a regiment pass by. A hidden gramophone accompanied him from behind the scene, playing a distant infantry-march followed by the beat of drums.

The illusion was so complete that some of the spectators turned their heads towards the windows, hidden by heavy curtains. When he had ended, he was greeted by loud applause. Sablin rose from his seat and went into an adjoining drawing-room, the sight so depressed him. Only three days before, after having, with the aid of his dismounted division, thrown back a terrific attack of the German infantry accompanied by the heavy fire of the artillery, he had retreated into reserve about thirty miles to the rear, leaving the position in charge of the infantry come to relieve him. He still saw before his eyes the last scene that he had witnessed, when the division crossed a half-frozen river, which as the ice formed had risen and overflowed, shifting into the middle of the stream the clumsy bridge, built in September by the Cossacks. The men had to climb on to the bridge on horseback, belly-deep in the water and climb off in the same way. The bottom of the river was muddy and the regiments as they waded through, trampled the mud, making deep holes in it. The sky was overclouded and a cold, bitter wind accompanied by snow, rent the air.

Rusty looking ice-blocks streamed down the river. The horses would suddenly disappear belly-deep into the water and then again climb out upon some sand-bank, splashing the water and ice about them. Sablin passed the whole day watching the passage of his troops across the river, the artillery having taken

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a long time to do it. It was by moon-light that he crossed the river himself, and proceeded at a trot, getting ahead of the last squadrons of the Cossack regiment, to his night-quarters. The last impression he had retained was that of a young Cossack lieutenant, on regimental duty, accompanying him past the regiment along a narrow wood-path and shouting lustily to the Cossacks: "Keep to the right." The young officer's face seemed familiar to Sablin who inquired his name.

"Lieutenant Karpoff," was the answer.

"You were wounded at Jeliesnitza?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"And you have already recovered?"

"Entirely, Your Excellency."

They were outdistancing grim looking Cossacks, seemingly hungry and overfatigued, and that young officer alone looked bright and happy. Sablin look at him attentively and became conscious that faith, hope and love—but above all love—were the cause of his blissful state. Later Sablin with his head-adjutant, buglers and orderlies had ridden along the highroad until he reached a village priest's house where he stayed over night, sleeping on straw spread out in the dining room. The next morning he had proceeded in a motor-car to the nearest railway station when it took him thirty-six hours to get to Petrograd. His daughter and Countess Paltoff had persuaded him to make his appearance at the charity ball. And now he had had to listen to "The soldiers are coming" sung by a Jewish looking ensign, who had never been to war.

"How are you, Alexander Nicolaievitch?" said Pestretzoff, who was sitting in a corner of the room with Oblienissimoff and a lively but elderly civilian in a black tunic of military cut, unshaved and with golden spectacles. "Our brave Rumiantzoff! Wonders have been told about your division. Are you acquainted?" he went on addressing the civilian.

"Alexander Ivanovitch Pootchkoff, our magician. Yes, my dear Alexander Nicolaievitch, these business-men, with their practical system have succeeded where we failed despite our military erudition. And if Alexei Andreievitch Polivanoff is

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our Prince Pojarsky, this is our Minin! The army is saved. Towards spring you will be flooded with munitions and cartridges, and you'll have no end of aeroplanes at your disposal. Such are our allies."

"Not the allies alone, Jakoff Petrovitch. We are likewise establishing our own industry on a large scale. We have proclaimed the motto: 'Everything for the sake of war!'" remarked Pootchkoff in a calm, insinuating voice.

"Good luck," said Sablin.

"Well, and what news from the front?" inquired Oblienissimoff. "You can talk quite openly, we are all of us reliable men."

"The state of mind at the front is such that I would describe it with pleasure even in the presence of the enemy. Give us the technical perfection that the Germans dispose of and you can order us to Berlin."

"Well said," exclaimed Pestretzoff.

"I don't wish to over-rate anything, but the fact is that our soldiers have always been and, let us hope, will always be the best soldiers in the world. The officers are worthy of admiration: thank God, so far, we haven't had any Jews at the front, like the one who has just appeared on the stage."

"He's not much of a Jew," remarked Pestretzoff with reserve.

"And why should a Jew not be an officer?" Pootchkoff rejoined.

"Maybe I shall not be able to answer your question but I assert that no officer not belonging to that race would allow himself to behave as that Knoop just did. It was perfectly disgusting to see him play the fool when his brother officers are sitting in the trenches. Look at the way he's got up. Do you call that a uniform?"

"You're always the same, Sasha," Oblienissimoff remarked. "You're not up-to-date, you do not realize that there is a new tendency which must be brought to life by the army."

"You just mentioned, uncle, that we are among ourselves; the majority of the guests are, I believe, engaged in admiring

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Preobrajenskaïa's dancing. Be frank, then, and say that a revolution is being prepared."

"Aren't you of opinion that a revolution is required?" asked Pestretzoff. "Haven't not only we, the upper-class, but likewise the peasant-class come to the fatal conclusion that such an end is inevitable and moreover desirable?"

"In that case I don't belong to your upper-class, because, in my opinion, a revolution is out of question during warfare and even later on. What would be the object?"

"But what's to be done?" Pootchkoff asked in an undertone.

"The throne must be supported by every means! That's what I told my uncle eighteen months ago and go on repeating. You can call me a reactionary, but I consider that it would be folly to overthrow a throne during such a dreadful war!"

A heavy silence ensued, broken by the sounds of music and the patter of feet which came from the adjoining ball-room through the half-open door.

"The throne is falling as it is and we have not the power to support it," said Pootchkoff in a calm, soft voice; but Sablin noticed that he was anything but calm.

"We have done all we could. You remember the enthusiasm when the war broke out, what faith in the Tsar prevailed then, how universal was the impulse to follow him and die for his sake, and what has been the result? Rasputin has become more arrogant than ever. His influence on Alexandra Fedorovna has increased and threatens the welfare of Russia. You know Admiral Baltoff? He did wonders in Sebastopol. A telegram was sent to the Emperor, requesting him to confer a high post on him, where he would be in a position to bring about some reorganization. The Emperor gave his consent and signed the nomination. Thereupon she hastened to Mohyleff with the result that two hours later a counter-order was signed by him to the effect that Baltoff had to leave Sebastopol and take over a sinecure in the rear of the army."

"That was evidently done to please the Germans and probably in accordance with an order received from Berlin," remarked Pestretzoff.

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"The Grand Dukes themselves are opposed to the Tsar. They tried to persuade the Emperor, wrote him letters, and finished by falling into disgrace. The Emperor's reply was that he preferred to put up with Rasputin than with her Majesty's hysterics," said Oblienissimoff.

"Both she and he should have the power of governing withdrawn from them, but the principles of monarchism should not be shaken," said Sablin.

"My dear fellow, it has been shaky for ever so long. The liaison between the Empress and Rasputin is a matter of gossip in all the regiments and there's not much respect left with regard to the Monarch," said Oblienissimoff.

"In which regiments do you mean? The regiments of the division under my command are ready to die for their Emperor, whatever his defects," exclaimed Sablin.

"So much the better. But the Petrograd garrison is of a different opinion. The revolutionary watch-words are beginning to penetrate the military classes and you won't hear the national hymn at roll-call in the local regiments any longer. If in the companies the workmen's 'marseillaise' has not so far been sung officially, you can trust my word that the soldiers know it," Pootchkoff rejoined. "And whether you wish to or not, you've got to bear this in mind."

"That's the result of drilling the soldiers in the streets. As I drove this morning from the station to my lodging I noticed that abomination. I saw a crowd instead of military ranks, one gun in a stand, and close by some suspicious looking individuals with newspapers and pamphlets. That's evidently the way of forming a republican army. . . ."

No one replied.

"Drill must take place in the open fields," Sablin went on. "Send them to us as reserve and I guarantee that we'll teach them without spoiling them. Even here at this very festival I see the work of the rear."

"Do you blame that lovely Natalie Borisovna?" said Pestretzoff.

"What was the sense of placing those badly drilled idiots in

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shakos and pre-war uniforms at the entrance? So as to let them witness all this luxury, the depravity of the upper ten, their elegance, the exquisite food and wine, and then send them to cold and damp trenches under that impression?"

"As though they did not know!" said Pestretzoff.

At this moment Countess Paltoff joined them.

"I must say, it's polite of you, my friends," she began. "I'm on the point of appearing on the stage and here you are hidden in this room, as though I did not exist."

"We've only just had a smoke, Countess," answered Oblie-nissimoff, rising heavily from his arm-chair.

"You can smoke later on. Besides I know what your smoking means: you just simply longed to jaw, you everlasting chatter-box! Alexander Nicolaievitch, give me your attention. I'm going to sing that charming 'Barcarolle' by Gounod. Just listen to the refrain. It reminds one of waves rocking a boat."

And she hummed:

Dites, la jeune et belle
Ou voulez-vous aller
La voile ouvre son aile
La brise va souffler.

Thundering applause greeted Countess Paltoff as she appeared in the ball-room arm-in-arm with Sablin. The applause was meant for her, as mistress of the house, and for Sablin, his St. George's cross and for the fame that preceded his name.

A civilian in a long black frock-coat with a withered, beardless old face rose from his arm-chair and, stopping Sablin, stretched a bundle of hundred rouble notes towards him.

"Here are ten thousand roubles, Your Excellency," he said, "distribute them among your heroes."

Sablin was at a loss how to act, but Countess Paltoff came to the rescue.

"That's our constant purveyor, Lapin, a great patriot and benefactor. Tell me what you wish me to buy for your men and I'll buy the things you need and send them with you to the front."

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"Many thanks, Countess, that's the best plan," said Lapin.

The ovation Sablin and the Countess met with lasted some time, and Sablin felt his eyes fill with tears at the sight of all the bright glances directed at him and of the small hands clapping in his honour. In the crowd he noticed his daughter Tania's sweet face, flushed with excitement.

Countess Paltoff, noticing his confusion, went to the stage. The spectators repaired to their seats.

When the Countess had finished her song she was greeted with such enthusiastic applause that she felt abashed by her success and, leaving the stage, mixed with the crowd of spectators. Sablin profited by the pause to regain the entrance hall. His nerves were shaken and he decided to take a breath of fresh air and then to return and fetch Tania towards the end of supper.

Sablin succeeded, after some difficulty, in finding his overcoat and left the house.

X

THE streets were brightly lit, crowded tram-cars passed by with soldiers hanging on to the steps. Soldiers could be seen everywhere. They shoved their way through on the pavements; nibbling sun-flower seeds, they loitered about beside the cinemas and music-halls. Sablin had not been in Petrograd for eighteen months and hardly knew the town again, owing to the multitude of cinemas, miniature stages, with singing, dancing and variety shows that had been opened of late. He found it hard to imagine where that large contingent of artistic elements had come from and who they were.

Notwithstanding the hour, soldiers loitered about the town with perfect freedom. They were sober and the majority saluted Sablin respectfully, but their aspect, far from approaching that of soldiers of the Guards, could hardly have been called military at all. They wore their fur caps in a slovenly way, the majority had no belts round their waists and those who wore them had buckled them in an off-hand way. Many of them were in the company of civilians and educated-looking girls.

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The film in one of the big cinemas on the Newsky prospect had just come to an end and one crowd of spectators was making room for a new one.

"Eh, comrades," cried a young soldier with enthusiasm, as he came out of the cinema and addressing his pals, "that's what I call enjoying life!"

"Everything is attainable to those who dare it," said a young woman in the garb of a sister of charity.

"And yet it's a criminal action," rejoined the same young soldier.

"I don't call that a serious crime," said the sister of charity disdainfully.

The soldier caught sight of Sablin and pulled himself together.

The rain had stopped, but a heavy mist had replaced it. The town had an unusual aspect, as though the population had increased by a hundred per cent. There were any amount of Polish refugees, whose language was heard at every moment. Sablin recalled the first action in which he had taken part, remembered the manor, and Count Ledokhovski and his guests. He went along the Newsky prospect, full of indignation. The cinemas that had grown like mushrooms along the Newsky, the Liteiny, in all the main and side streets, advertised, by flashy posters and pictures, the most tempting titles, the hidden sense of which meant: "Proletarians of every country assemble! Down with warfare! Peace to the huts and destruction to the palaces!" A horrid civil-war was being openly propagated by the film, and millions of spectators looked on, while those who should have kept their eyes open were blind.

There, far away was the front, where patient soldiers crossed half destroyed bridges in the cold of night, where they died without murmur; where the wounded, who, as Karpoff, had hardly recovered from their wounds, hastened back to their regiments; where for months they lived in dug-outs, and listened to the explosion of shrapnel in the trenches; where dumb graves without inscriptions stood as a silent reproach. There prevailed faith in God, in final victory, when the banners would be brought back in triumph to their native towns, greeted by

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young girls with flower-wreaths. There indeed charity likewise prevailed: that charity which means self-sacrifice for the sake of one's neighbour.

Only three days before Sablin had lived the holy life of a Christian, amidst Christians, at the front!

Now, far from the battle-field, he witnessed entire apathy regarding faith, he never once heard the name of Christ mentioned. He saw churches where only despair and hatred were propagated. The cinemas on the Newsky prospect, on the Liteiny prospect—everywhere, propagated despair and hatred. Here, close by, at the corner of a by-street, the insolent electric-light advertisement of a cinema announces cynically: "Only for grown-ups." And a crowd of young soldiers, a crowd of small boys and girls flows notwithstanding from out of its hospitable walls. Cynical jokes and immoral laughter become audible as they pour out into the street,—greedy, bestial laughter.

Sablin shuddered at the thought and, disgusted, made room for two soldiers who were dragging a girl, squeaking with laughter, along the street.

As he was nearing Countess Paltoff's house he overtook a General walking by the side of a tall elegant-looking Sister of Charity in a fashionable fur cloak and a red cross head-dress. He instantly recognized Samoïloff. Sablin intended to pass ahead but they quickened their pace and involuntarily he overheard their joyful and loud conversation. They were both under the influence of wine.

"Lioubov Matveievna," Samoïloff was saying. "Where shall we go? We must complete this evening. I have known you ever so long but it's the first time I've seen you as you are to-night."

"Do you approve of me—tonight?"

"Yes, I need you as you are tonight."

"Why?"

"Because that's what I've come from the front for."

"Not really."

"I began to notice that excessive continence acts on one's

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nerves and lessens one's energy and courage and our army corps doctor agreed."

"Quite a new discovery," Lioubov Matveievna remarked ironically.

"It's not new. In old days the Greeks and Romans were quite aware of it and that's why women always became the prey of the victors."

"And of late years?"

"Eminent Generals have likewise always known it. Skobeleff had girls sent to the army."

"Nicholai Zakharovitch you are cynical."

"I never pretended to be otherwise. Besides you yourself gave me to understand that '*les affaires sont les affaires*,' and I understood what you meant."

"However, Nicholai Zakarovitch, '*la plus belle fille ne peut donner que ce qu'elle a!*'"

"That's what I want."

"How quick you are."

"I have always been. That's the reason why they value me as Chief-of-Staff: the slightest hint is enough to give me a definite insight into the plans of my superiors. Where shall we go?"

Lioubov Matveievna shortened her pace.

"That's the question! You've got no apartment, and I cannot possibly receive you, because I live at the hospital and very seldom stay over night with my mother. Where are you stopping?"

"At the 'Hotel du Nord.'"

"They won't let me in."

"You have evidently a very poor opinion of my capacities as officer of the General Staff. I had foreseen this eventuality. My wife figures in my passport and I have warned the servants that I expect my wife from the country tonight or tomorrow night."

"How could you tell that I. . . . That I would ever consent?"

"I did not believe you would."

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"In that case you had another woman in view. May I ask who my rival is?"

"I had woman in general in mind. I thought of a beautiful and interesting woman, and I have found someone much better than I had expected. I have found a woman of refinement and education, and such women in matters of love stand much higher than women of the ordinary standard. I quite realize that I shall thereby incur much heavier expenses but the pleasure will be more acute."

"It will cost you very dear and I pity you, Nicholai Zakharovitch, acquainted as I am with your means. However, since I am sincere with regard to you I'd better be entirely frank. I must live. I'm a woman of the world, am received everywhere in society, and that leads to various obligations. I must be well-dressed, must behave modestly, be careful in my choice and not repeat this sort of thing too often. I can rely on you not telling tales out of school. Life is getting more expensive every day. A simple red-cross dress costs over one hundred roubles. This is why I consider it my duty to warn you beforehand that I intend robbing you."

"Well?"

They stopped. Sablin was passing them at that very moment and distinctly heard the one, harshly pronounced, word:

"Five hundred."

XI

THE next morning after Countess Paltoff's party, when he awoke, Sablin lay long on the sofa in his study, which had been turned into a bed room. It was nine o'clock already. At the front he was used to rise at seven and to start for the position at eight.

A grey, dull winter morning threw its dim light through the yellow blinds. The curtains had not been pulled together and the study, hurriedly and temporarily transformed into a bedroom, had lost its former intimate aspect. Some old trinkets still stood on his desk, but all his papers and documents had been hidden away and the desk had a deserted look. The portrait

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of his wife hung on the opposite wall. A mild and straightforward expression lay in her eyes, too mild to have been capable of a falsehood. That dreadful diary of her's, written just before her suicide, was hidden in the library.

Sablin stretched his strong and powerful body, experienced a feeling of animal satisfaction due to the touch of the clean bed-linen and the soft pillows and looked with wide-open eyes at the portrait.

A white rose adorned Vera Constantinovna's golden hair and a blissful smile covered her beautiful features. But Sablin did not see her as she was represented on the picture. His mind's eye recalled her to his memory tortured by the martyrdom of shame and despair.

"Have you forgiven me?" her blue eyes seemed to say; and he shrank at the thought of that question full of suffering.

Why had she left him and deprived him of her presence as a woman. Was he, like Samoiloff, to seek solace and passing joy in the arms of a Liubov Matveïevna, to invite her to come and see him, to unveil her in the presence of that portrait, in his apartment, the abode of his daughter? Or was he to visit Ksenia Petrovna, that pretty divorced person, who had peered at him last night through her tortoise-shell lorgnette and said:

"How interesting you are, Alexander Nicolaievitch! I've taken a fancy to you. Come and see me tomorrow at six."

He had looked at her red dyed hair, at her painted face, glistening teeth and sensual lips, and an old reminiscence of his ensign life and of Kitty had flashed through his brain.

"What for?" he had replied.

"I'll greet you with tea and first-class cognac on a white bear-skin in my favourite soft squirrel-fur dressing-gown."

"And under the dressing-gown?" Sablin had inquired.

She had laughed showing her white teeth and, turning away from him, had retorted: "My skin."

Sablin shuddered at the thought. Vera Constantinovna was looking at him from the frame, smiling with her blue eyes.

"Would you forgive me?" he thought and his whole being

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felt the answer : "Yes, I'll forgive you! I wish you to be happy, were it but for one second!"

"You would forgive me," he went on musing, "but how about the others?"

And the picture of the icy river with its uncouth bridge, of the soldiers carefully wading into the cold water, of the livid faces of his men, came to him like a vision. "Would they forgive?" Hadn't he had sufficient experience? Kitty, Marousia, Vera Constantinovna! And others besides.

A satisfied, idle life, visits, dinner-parties, dances, brilliant reviews, military bands, all that by-gone life between the exercise-field and the theatre, the smell of the soldiers' sweat in the morning, and at night the scent of delicate perfumes and the animated faces of beautiful women. Hadn't he had his fill.

"And yet," Sablin thought, "have we not shown that we knew how to fight and die?"

How many lives had already been lost during the last eighteen months? What a number of casualties on the fields of Eastern Prussia and Galicia, in the Carpatian mountains and the Polish marshes!

And who are replacing them?

Sablin sat up in bed, horrified at the thought: Who is being sent to replace the fallen? That comic-song officer, who last night had sung that ditty about "The soldiers are coming!" who, after supper, had retired with the Countess into the small sitting-room. Among all that lot, who wore the signs of regiments of the Guard? Nothing but new faces, anything but soldiers.

One of them had awkwardly pushed a lady and had only excused himself by cheekily saying: "Sorry."

Three of them had calmly stuck to their seats while ladies were obliged to stand. Another had lit a cigar without asking the permission of the ladies or of his superiors. Though they were all sober, a certain impudence and off-handedness was obvious in their behaviour.

"We were capable of being in love with a Kitty, we were apt to lead astray innocent girls, as I did with Marousia," Sablin

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went on musing, "we went in for drinks and depravity, and yet we looked up to our deity, our faith, our ideals and we kept high our motto: For our Faith, our Tsar and our mother-country. We would have been incapable of scoffing at our faith, of criticizing our Tsar or of disliking our mother-country. Never could we be traitors."

"Wherein consists the faith of the present contingent? I don't even mean deep religious faith. Have they sufficient outward faith to stand decently in church, to place a taper or to kiss an ikon? Have they the semblance of that discipline of the soul, which is given by religion? They neither respect nor like the Tsar, and how about their mother-country?"

These new officers had quite new notions. Sablin endeavoured to find a denomination for these new elements, to define them by one special word, until that word flashed through his mind and made his blood curdle:

"Revolutionary officers."

Was it possible that the phantom which seemed to hang in the air and which his uncle Oblienissimoff, Samoïloff, Pestretzoff and others had hinted at, was going to take a material shape? Was a revolution really fermenting?

His decision to return to the front was made. He dressed and rang for the servant. Some time elapsed before there was a knock at the door and his daughter's maid, Pasha, made her appearance. Her pretty face had still traces of recent sleep, her hair was elegantly though hurriedly dressed, and she was smartly attired. She threw a bold and free glance at Sablin.

"Is my daughter up?" Sablin inquired.

"Tatiana Alexandrovna is still asleep," Pasha replied.

Sablin looked at her, she returned his glance, and he was the first to feel abashed.

"Good," he said, "bring my tea here. And let me have my trunk; I'm leaving today."

Sablin passed the whole day with his daughter. They walked together through their favourite streets. And again Sablin noticed that the aspect of the town had altered. He was surprised at the abundance of articles in the jewellers' shops. Dia-

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monds, precious stones of various descriptions, silver and golden trinkets glittered in all the show-windows and, despite the fabulous prices, found buyers. Sablin studied his daughter and the result caused him satisfaction.

"Tania," he said as he stopped in front of a jeweller's shop, "let's go inside. I wish to make you a present of those turquoise ear-rings as a keep-sake."

The young girl looked at him with a pale smile.

"No, father," she answered. "Don't buy me anything now. I should be ashamed of wearing such jewelry during the war."

"Did you enjoy yourself last night at Natalie Borisovna's?" he asked.

"Yes and no," said Tania. "I felt ill at ease. When there's so much suffering about, owing to the war, it seems unnatural to go in for amusement. I was shocked, father, at the way some of the officers behaved. Don't you find, father, that they hardly look like officers?"

Sablin did not answer.

"Father," Tania said in an undertone, as they had passed the Morskaya, "Father, don't you intend to pay your obeissance to Her Majesty?"

"No," Sablin answered curtly. "I'm leaving tonight for my division. It's not necessary. But why do you ask?"

"Last week the Grand Duchess Olga Nicholaievna asked me why you had never been on leave, even after having been wounded. She said that the Empress was very fond of you and had up to this very day not forgotten my mother."

"Tania," Sablin replied, pressing his daughter's hand, "never mention the Empress and your mother together. You must not know. . . ."

"But I do know," said Tania calmly.

"What do you know," exclaimed Sablin, whose hair seemed to stand on end.

"The Empress caused my mother no end of evil."

"What evil?" Sablin asked.

"I don't know, but I heard her say: 'I have been greatly in

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fault with regard to your mother, but I hope that there she will have forgiven me.' "

"Tania, I beseech you never, never to touch this subject in my presence."

"Very well, father, but you must forgive the Empress. She is so miserable. One must love her."

"Come, come, my darling," Sablin exclaimed. "Is that possible for me?"

They had passed by the massive granite enclosure of the Winter-Palace garden and were now on the Palace quay. The white clouds, that had covered the sky in the morning, had now dispersed and a pale-blue sky opened out above the Peter-Paul citadel. The wide expanse of the Neva, covered with snow, glittered before their eyes. A machine-gun rattled in the neighbourhood of the citadel. Soldiers were busy at gun-drill on the ice. To their right stood the cold Winter-Palace covered with hoar-frost, and the signboards of the Red Cross on its facade made a strange impression. The whole beauty of the quay suddenly opened out under the rays of the pale winter sun and Sablin's heart filled with ecstasy at the calm magnificence of the majestic river. Tania had evidently been overcome with a similar sensation.

"Father," she said, as she pressed his arm with her little hand clad in a warm, woolen glove. "Father, do you believe that the Germans are likely to take Petrograd? It suddenly occurred to me that foreigners might take possession of our town, destroy and burn the beautiful palaces, devastate the Hermitage, carrying away the works of art, and that we would not be able to live here any longer. Father, tell me that that's impossible."

"Of course, dear, there can be no question of such a possibility," said Sablin, but his voice lacked firmness.

"You won't let them, will you?" she went on, looking with pride at her father and at the St. George's ribbon in his button-hole.

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XII

THE train bound for Sarna was to start in the evening. Tania and Pasha came to see him off. On the right a train for Tsarskoie Selo was leaving from the suburban platform, where elegantly dressed ladies of the hussar and sharp-shooter regiments were seen, accompanied by officers partly in khaki caps, partly in pre-war, bright coloured caps. Life seemed to be going on here as brilliant, noisy and varied as usual, ignoring the war.

The International sleeping-car compartment was brightly lit by electric light. A respectful guard showed Sablin to his berth, saying that he would travel alone as far as Tsarskoie Selo, where a passenger would join the train and take possession of the second berth.

The train stopped at Tsarskoie Selo. A woman's voice was heard, exclaiming close by his window: "Au revoir. Come back soon. Bring your disgusting war to an end. You've fought long enough."

He seemed to know the voice.

Sablin approached the window, screening his face with the palms of his hands, and perceived a sister of charity gaily taking leave of a General. The General was Samoïloff, the sister—Lioubov Matveievna.

A minute later the train was again in motion and Samoïloff, his face red with the frost, entered the compartment.

"Ah! Your Excellency!" he said, greeting Sablin, "what a pleasant surprise. So we are travelling together as far as Mohyleff. We'll be able to chat together. Well, how did you find our rear?"

"Awful!"

"Not really? Why they are working at full steam, and magnificent, glorious work it is too!"

"What does the work consist in?" Sablin inquired.

"In preparing for the revolution," whispered Samoïloff.

Sablin gasped.

"What? I've terrified you. So I expected. You, an ex-aide-de-camp, a General à la suite of His Majesty obliged all

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of a sudden to listen to such words and from whose lips? From those of an old, weather-beaten General bound for Supreme Headquarters. . . . You must get used to this. . . .”

“In time of war?” said Sablin.

“I’ve caught you there! Consequently you would admit it in time of peace,” continued Samoïloff, smiling.

“I never said so,” rejoined Sablin with warmth, “and never shall!”

“You don’t seem to have studied the new soldier and the new officer during your stay in Petrograd, Alexander Nicolaievitch.”

“On the contrary. I have studied them quite specially. It’s them I had in mind when I said ‘Awful.’”

“Probably their outward aspect, their want of discipline, a certain slovenliness in their attire, in their way of saluting has displeased you. I agree with you that outward discipline is wanting. But, Alexander Nicolaievitch, we are training conscious soldiers,” said Samoïloff.

“You won’t consider it indiscreet on my part if I ask you what you mean by: ‘we’?”

“We,” Samoïloff replied, “are those who see that the government has chosen a wrong path, who have realized that the old system of warfare must lead us to defeat and we are searching for new ways. We are preparing a conscious soldier, *i.e.*, a soldier capable of understanding all the intricacies of the political position, a soldier capable of criticizing and analysing.”

“In other words you intend to inoculate the army with politics,” Sablin exclaimed with indignation.

“Well, just a touch of politics. We wish the army to realize that Rasputins do not embody the Russian Monarchy, that men like Varnava, Stürmer and Sukhomlinoff won’t do. We need power to destroy stubbornness. Maybe a small court revolution.”

“Will you be able to put a stop at that? I tremble when I hear you talk. And you are going to Supreme Headquarters with such thoughts! Great Heavens, what’s to come of this?”

“I have been called to Supreme Headquarters as a man of counsel,” Samoïloff retorted, not without comical dignity.

“I shall have to report about you,” said Sablin.

TO RED FLAG

"Please do so. But remember that I'm not the only one and that you'll hardly succeed in getting us all hanged. We are in power and not only the higher staff but likewise the Grand Dukes side with us. Whom have you got to rely upon?"

"The soldiers," Sablin exclaimed with pride.

Samoïloff laughed ironically.

"You believe in them? A herd of sheep, a mercenary Russian rabble, capable of following those who offer them most!" Samoïloff exclaimed as he rose to his feet. "Are you going to dine? There's a dining-car on the train."

Sablin looked at him with disgust.

"No," he replied curtly. "I had dinner at home."

"As you please," said Samoïloff, stretching himself. "As for me I have a mighty appetite."

Whereupon, bending his bald head encircled by very scant grey hair and shrugging his broad shoulders, Samoïloff left the compartment.

Sablin flung himself back and leaned against the compartment cushions. He was hungry. Not only had he not dined but he had not even had time to lunch owing to his hurried departure. But the thought of having to sit with that awful man and of being, perhaps, obliged to listen to his disheartening conversation was unendurable.

"No, for nothing in the world! A revolutionary General. Even they have turned up in Russia, like fungi in a marsh, these leaders of revolutionary officers," Sablin went on thinking.

"Gracious Lord, but a short while ago, impressed by Thy meek teaching, I had vowed pure Christian love to mankind and how many have I learned to hate since! I am incapable of forgiving the Empress, I hate Rasputin, I hate all these new conscious officers and soldiers, I abhor this revolutionary General Samoïloff. Hatred instead of love. It's all very well to love those that hate us, but how if they hate not me, but my country and Thee who was crucified for us? Where am I to look for an answer?"

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

Sablin fetched the Holy Gospel out of his hand-bag, opened it at haphazard and the first words that caught his eyes were:

“Vengeance is in me, saith the Lord.”

Samoïloff came upon Sablin as the latter was reading the Gospel. He looked askance at the book and, smiling ironically, proceeded to undress. He stretched himself under the bed-linen, purposely took a yellow frivolous French novel out of the compartment net and proceeded to cut the pages.

They did not exchange a single word until they arrived at Mohyleff; and Samoïloff left the compartment without taking leave of Sablin. After he had left, Sablin heaved a sigh of relief. It seemed to him as though the very air of the compartment had grown purer.

XIII

THE train was late and Sablin did not reach Sarny until past two a. m. His favourite orderly, the hussar sergeant Shapovaloff, his military-servant, Semion, a soldier of the Guards, who had accompanied him from Petrograd and had become, as it were, a member of his family and his chauffeur, Petroff, met him at the station.

“Welcome, Your Excellency,” said Semion as he entered the compartment and proceeded to take his luggage out of the net. We did not expect you back so soon. Your Excellency has had a very short rest. How’s the health of Her Excellency Tatiana Nicolaievna? Is the English miss still with you? And how’s Pasha?”

“And what’s up here,” asked Sablin after having answered Semion’s questions.

“Fine, Sir. All’s quiet and well. Leda is moping for you. Florestan was shod yesterday.”

Shapovaloff, who was standing on the quay, greeted his General with a sonorous voice and reported all the news concerning the division-life.

“Captain Mikhailitchenko has been rewarded with the military cross of St. Anne for the battle of Jeliesnitza and Lieutenant Karpoff—with the St. George’s sword. A cable came

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from the army headquarters to that effect the day before yesterday. Soon after your wire announcing your arrival was received. The Chief-of-Staff decided to wait until you had arrived. They'll receive their rewards tomorrow at three p.m. The military band of the lancer regiment will play during the banquet and our hostess promised to bake a pie."

Sablin felt as if he had returned to his family, and found the atmosphere amid these simple men much cosier and warmer than in his Petrograd home.

Petroff, in a smart fur coat with red shoulder-straps, walked behind him giving particulars of the road.

"The road is excellent, and there's not much snow. At Boron we got stuck a bit as we came this way. We'll arrive at about nine."

Sablin's favourite Russo-Baltic motor-car, roughly but strongly built, was standing on the small square to which the dark streets of the small hamlet with their wooden houses led. The bright lamps of the motor threw long sheaves of light onto the street and lit up a window with a white lowered blind. A peasant's sledge was waiting outside for someone and the small, shaggy bay horse, covered with a mat, shied with frightened eyes. Sablin looked with pleasure at the small, blue and yellow division flag with the familiar division cypher and realized that the feeling of hatred that he had brought back from Petrograd was waning. He seated himself in the motor-car. Shapovaloff and Semion carefully tucked his legs into a fur rug.

"Ready Sir?" asked Petroff.

"Yes, let's go," answered Sablin, gleefully breathing the fresh night-air.

At headquarters tea was ready. Colonel Varlam Nicholaievitch Semionoff, the Chief-of-Staff, a short man with bandy legs, Captain Davydenko, dark, good-looking and proud of his long moustache, the fat military Doctor Oospensky and two young ensigns, Pavloff and von Dahl, were waiting for him in the dining room. The owners of the house, a young priest and his pretty wife, Alexandra Petrovna, who was the subject of general admiration, were likewise present.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

They sat down at a long table covered by a pink table-cloth with white designs, on which a large copper tea-kettle was boiling. Through the transparent curtains and the round leaves of the geraniums on the small windows the frozen lake, the distant hills and the dark pine-forest could be discerned.

"You don't mind, Your Excellency," said Semionoff, "my having invited for tonight those who have been rewarded by decorations and the knights of the St. George's cross? Fifty all told. Perhaps you are tired and would like to rest?"

"Nonsense, Varlam Nicholaievitch! After tea we'll ride across to the Commander of the army corps and I expect to be back at one. Has the sword been sent for Karpoff?"

"Nothing of the sort," exclaimed Davydenko indignantly. "They are such spendthrifts at headquarters and yet they've only sent a small cross and the sword-knot, though I am more than certain that they have charged the cost of the sword in full."

"Robbery," sighed stout Oospensky.

"I'm sorry," said Sablin, "I was hoping to present him with a first-class weapon, as a keepsake for his descendants. He's a first-rate officer. His father was likewise an excellent officer. He was killed at Nida just as he was going to be rewarded with the St. George's cross."

"The sword could be managed," said Davydenko, "if Your Excellency doesn't object to incurring a small expense."

"Tell me how?"

"A week ago the equipment of a fallen Cossack Captain was on sale about twenty miles off at the headquarters of the Kuban regiment. Among others there was a splendid Caucasian sabre, with a dark blade of wonderful workmanship. The price was three hundred roubles and the sabre has remained unsold. If you had no objection, I could ride across in your motor-car. As for the money, we could raise it from our household funds."

"I'll pay for it," said Sablin. "See whether you can't have the small white cross set into the handle."

"That can easily be done. The chauffeur Petroff is a skilful locksmith. At about three p.m. the job will be completed and

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"I'll borrow Alexandra Petrovna's velvet cushion to present it on."

"Thank you, Mikhail Ivanovitch. Do your best."

After tea Sablin, accompanied by the Chief-of-Staff, rode to the army headquarters.

A stolid hussar in a short fur jacket and high, brilliantly polished boots stood in the street close by the priest's house, holding a tall black mare by the bridle. Her glistening coat shone in the sun. Her short tail beat her flanks nervously, whipping away imaginary flies. Leda knew what she was worth, that she was her master's favourite, that a bracing journey along a soft snow-covered road lay in store for her amid the sweet scent of a fir-forest in the sun-shine, followed by a pleasant rest in the priest's warm stable, where good fodder was waiting for her as well as the companionship of her old friend Florestan.

Sablin and Semionoff mounted, and set off at a trot.

"I am glad that you will succeed in giving joy to Karpoff," said Semionoff. "In your absence I have got to know him better. He's a splendid youth."

"An excellent officer."

"His only wish is to die on the battle-field. You know, he has been at the hospital of Her Majesty and was quite taken by his experience there. I'm afraid the poor lad's madly in love with the Grand Duchess Tatiana Nicholaievna."

"I expect that's not so very serious," said Sablin.

"His dream is to die the death of a hero on condition she knows of it."

"Sheer childishness," Sablin replied.

"And yet, Your Excellency, there's something in that childishness. How many have been killed and have died in hospitals, empty-hearted. This one, at least, will die with his heart full of happiness and love."

"Why speak so mournfully. He may easily outlive us."

"Your Excellency must forget how many have fallen already. You remember Seriojin?"

"The hussar?"

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"The 'small hussar' as the sisters of the army corps field-hospital called him. He was a wonderfully handsome lad, and sung beautifully. And do you remember Sister Ksenia, the French girl? Well, they loved one another with a pure, chaste love. Neither of them dreamed of a betrothal, each considering the other so much superior. During a patrol mission at Kamen-Kashirsky a company of Germans cut him off. 'Follow me, lads,' he cried, attacked the company with drawn sabre and managed to escape and save all his men. He himself had, however, two wounds in the stomach. How he ever succeeded in getting back is a marvel. He was brought to the field-hospital and Ksenia nursed him. I was present at the time. He looked at us and at Ksenia. He must have been suffering agonies. 'How fine death is!' he said, closed his eyes and died. Karpoff's the same style. Such lads would never dream of saying or even of thinking that a live cur is better off than a dead lion."

"Have you known any to say so?"

"Formally their number was limited, now it's increasing. As for Karpoff, there's not a dangerous and risky deed that he would refuse to undertake."

The Commander of the 177th division and the Commander of the 709th regiment are engaged with the Commander of the army corps," said a pink-cheeked, curly-haired orderly officer in a smartly cut tunic, as he ushered Sablin and Semionoff into a dark sitting-room, richly furnished with antique furniture.

"However I'll announce you."

He left, but soon returned.

"The Commander of the army corps is ready to receive you," he said.

Sablin passed into a small room, where Lieutenant-General Zinovieff, whom he had known in Petrograd, and a sombre-looking Colonel were seated. The Commander of the army corps, the old infantry General Lossovsky, rose to greet him.

"How soon you've returned!" he said. "You evidently did not feel at your ease in Petrograd! How happy I am to have you back, the more so, as we need your advice. I cannot agree with Leonid Leonidovitch. Do you know one another? Major-

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General Sablin, commanding the cavalry division. Our Murat. . . .”

“Of course we’ve had the pleasure of meeting in Petrograd,” said Zinovieff with a soft smile. “I believe the General could be of help to us,” he went on addressing the Commander of the army corps.

“Look here, Alexander Nicolaievitch,” said Lossovsky, with a wide wave of the hand at a map, “our opinions clash. I’ve again to listen to words that I abhor and that I mustn’t listen to: ‘it’s impossible.’ In warfare nothing’s impossible, gentlemen, when men are ready to sacrifice their lives.”

He puckered his puffy lips and stroked his hanging moustache. “I don’t expect that Bagration ever said to Soovoroff that anything was impossible. My dear Colonel, everything is possible for a Russian soldier. It’s only a question of the percentage of casualties! And losses during war are inevitable.”

“If, however, Your Excellency, the losses reach one hundred percent, nothing can come of it,” said the Commander of the regiment in a respectful, but somewhat gruff tone.

Lossovsky shrugged his broad shoulders.

“The long and the short of it,” he said, addressing Sablin, “is that we must find that soldier of the time of Peter the Great, you know that hero, whom Peter the Great, during a dispute with the Prussian King Frederic on discipline, ordered to jump out of the window. We must find an officer who would boldly and unhesitatingly face certain death. And neither Colonel Sonin nor Leonid Leonidovitch can find an officer of that description in the forces under their command. Eh? What do you say to that?”

“I don’t know your plan yet, Your Excellency,” Sablin remarked.

“I’ll explain it to you. Look at the map.”

It was a huge plan, consisting of various sheets stuck together and representing in its most minute details the disposition of the Russian forces and of those of the enemy. Two zigzag lines, one red, the other black, met and disjoined, covering the outlines of forests, marshes and villages.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"We intend advancing as soon as the spring sets in," Lossovsky began in an undertone. "Of course that's no secret to anyone. All the Jews of Rafalovka know it and German as well as Russian military correspondents write on the subject. The Commander of the army has entrusted the forcing through of the position to my army corps. I'll be provided with reinforcements. You'll understand that preliminary work must be done, we must prepare new positions for the batteries, we must rehearse, so to speak, the whole play, so as to attack without default. I want to break through on a narrow front and intend the cavalry—two or three divisions, yours among others—to follow on the warm scent. Now, my dear Alexander Nicolaievitch, have a look at the map and tell me where you would consider it best to strike the blow and where to lead the demonstration."

"I'm well acquainted with the locality and with the position," said Sablin. "I fought there with my division last autumn. I would strike the blow at Kostioukhnovka and would demonstrate at Vulka-Galousiska."

"You see! What did I tell you?" said Zinovieff triumphantly to Lossovsky.

"His Excellency says that because he is unacquainted with the circumstances," said the Commander of the infantry regiment in a hoarse bass voice. "A fatal circumstance comes in here. As you see our trenches and those of the enemy come into close touch at Kostioukhnovka, forming a so-called 'Eagle's Nest.' Thirty paces only divide our trenches from theirs. The soldiers can converse from trench to trench. Not only is it impossible to move from the trench, you can't even look through the embrasure of a steel shield without risking being killed."

"No doubt," Sablin confirmed. "Considering the proximity—a distance of barely thirty paces,—bayonet work would be called for. The position is occupied by Pilsudsky's Polish brigade, and the Poles are sure to bolt as soon as our men come near the wire-fencing. Where you propose starting lies a dense marshy forest. To fix artillery there would be out of the

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question. Besides they have three rows of barb-wire supported by machine-guns, deep trenches, a part strongly cemented, and the position is held by dismounted Hungarian cavalry. We know them but too well: they know how to die. Then again there's a distance of about three miles to cover. How many are likely to survive? Here you are certain to lose twenty or thirty men, whereas there, by the time you reach the position, you are bound to lose several hundred."

"Your Excellency," replied the Commander of the infantry regiment, "it's a simple question of psychology. You say yourself that we are 'certain' to lose, and that certainty causes the difficulty. The first who leave the trenches are certain to be killed, that it to say, to commit suicide. And no one is particularly keen to look certain death in the face. We had intended to dislodge the Poles and straighten the front and I called for volunteers—with no result. One drunken Captain volunteered at first, but when he was sober again he thought better of it. Another officer, a lieutenant, who had more than once distinguished himself in various perilous ventures, had been wounded three times and had lost one eye, a cripple in other words, had first consented but at the very last moment he changed his mind, saying that committing suicide meant tempting God."

"We need fresh elements, Your Excellency," said Zinovieff, "who are not acquainted with all the particulars. If, for instance, on the eve of the attack, Alexander Nicolaievitch sent us some of his bold men I am quite certain that we could find desperate fellows, fatalists, among the Cossacks, who would dare it. I remember that in August 1914 in the Laboonsk forest my infantry wavered. We were in a thicket as dense as a jungle, when the Austrians fired without relaxing, when up came the Cossacks. They dismounted, crossed themselves and disappeared in the thicket, followed by my infantry. In two hours the enemy was overpowered, and we captured over six hundred prisoners. The same would happen in this case if we had fresh elements, free of the hypnosis of fear. Look at my fellows here. They've been sitting here the whole winter and not one

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

single day has gone by but some one has been killed and always in the Eagle's Nest. Every month I put in a fresh company and every week five to ten men of the company are killed. The whole division knows the Eagle's Nest."

Sablin kept silent for a long while.

"I understand," he said at last, "that we send our men to commit a deed of daring, if there is but one single chance of their escaping death. When a squadron is sent to charge, we know that fifty per cent are likely to fall, but we do not know beforehand which of them are doomed, whereas in this case we sentence certain individuals to death. And yet it must be done."

"Help us, Alexander Nicolaievitch! I have entire confidence in your division," said Lossovsky. "Pick out some scoundrel who would in any case have been sentenced to death by court-martial, give him the St. George's cross beforehand and send 1,000 roubles to his widow. What do you say to that?"

"No, Your Excellency," Sablin replied seriously and musingly, slightly stuttering with excitement, "a sacred deed must lie in the hands of one worthy of committing it—and such a man I'll find. Only tell me when and allow me to examine the position personally."

"If you like, come and meet me in the wood-cutter's hut on the first moon-light night and we can go together. It's impossible to get through during the day without the risk of being shot. I'll ring you up," said Sonin.

"Very well! I'll examine the position and shall find the officer you require," said Sablin as he rose to take leave of the army corps Commander.

"Thank you, Alexander Nicolaievitch," said Lossovsky shaking Sablin's hand.

XIV

To Leda's great disgust Sablin rode back at a foot-pace, only now and then falling into a short trot. They reached headquarters between two and three.

Semionoff pointed with his riding-stick to the hussars and

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Cossacks already falling in along the fence of the priest's house, and at the brass band getting ready their instruments.

The house itself had been transformed. The door leading from the dining room into the sitting room had been flung wide open and a table had been stretched from one room to the other. Whatever crockery was available in the village had been collected and the table had been laid for twenty guests. Davydenko had ridden across to the Caucasian division, where, by some miracle, wine was always to be found, and had brought back small bottles of Caucasian cognac and several bottles of Caucasian claret and hock.

The orderlies had done their best to give the banquet a ceremonial character and the priest's wife fussed about in the kitchen, assisted by Semionoff and the motor-car driver's assistant Poliakoff.

All the officers of the staff, the Commanders of the hussar and Don regiments whose men were to be rewarded, the Commander of the artillery division, Captain Mikhailitchenko and Lieutenant Karpoff had been invited to the banquet. The priest, in a lilac cassock, paced to and fro by the table, rubbing his hands and placing the chairs.

"It's a close fit, but that won't interfere," he muttered smiling joyfully as he looked at the bottles. "A regular feast of Belshazzar in my house."

The band met Sablin with the march of the regiment in which he had served for twenty years and which was full of so many reminiscences both happy and sad. He had heard it on first joining. The same march had been played to him and to Vera Constantinovna when, after the wedding-ceremony, they left the church; and to the sounds of that march would he be carried to his last resting-place. Such was Sablin's conviction, for he could not represent to himself his funeral under other circumstances. With the sound of that march was associated the thundering hurrah and the sunlit image of the crowned Commander-in-Chief of the Russian army, His Majesty the Emperor. Whenever Sablin heard the strains of that march, his heart melted with excitement and his eyes grew dim. Now he

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

dismounted, patted his horse and gave it some sugar, he made the round of the front and greeted the men, stolid fellows, mostly old friends, the heroes of Jeliesnitza.

"What splendid fellows!" thought Sablin. They haven't their match in the world."

"Heroes of Jeliesnitza!" he began, standing before the front, "in the name of His Majesty the Emperor I congratulate you on your nomination as knights of the cross of St. George."

A mighty shout: "We heartily thank Your Excellency," interrupted him.

"Wear these crosses and do honour to them," continued Sablin. "Remember that this cross of the martyr St. George binds you to behave on the battle-field as well as in time of peace, as it becomes a knight of St. George. You must serve as examples of courage and honest discipline to the rest of your comrades. And, once back in your respective villages, you will be looked upon as knights of the order and will have to behave soberly, honestly and work for the welfare of Russia and our great Tsar."

"We'll do our best, Your Excellency," replied the soldiers in unison.

Sablin passed over to the right flank. On the flank of the hussars stood the Commander of the regiment and by his side—the valiant Captain Mikhailitchenko who, at the head of his squadron, had broken through the ranks at Jeliesnitza. Captain Davydenko handed a small box with the decoration to Sablin.

"In the name of His Majesty the Emperor I confer on you, Captain, the order of St. Ann's military cross of the 2nd grade."

He passed the box to the Captain and stretched his hand to him.

"I thank you, Your Excellency," said the Captain. Their eyes met but for one second, but Sablin felt that this officer—an intelligent, highly educated man, married to an excellent musician and father of four children, would, without wavering, at that moment throw himself into the arms of death, of mutilation and torture for the sake of a piece of enamelled gold on a

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red ribbon. He knew that a gleeful telegram announcing the event would be sent that very day to Mikhailitchenko's plain wife and that she would shed tears of joy.

Sablin went on to where the soldiers stood and presented each one of them separately with the St. George's cross fixed to a ribbon, repeating to each of them the same words: "In the name of His Majesty the Emperor I decorate you with the St. George's cross!"

The soldiers took the cross awkwardly, the majority crossed themselves and kissed it.

On the right flank stood Colonel Protopopoff with Lieutenant Karpoff by his side. Hardly had Sablin looked at Karpoff's bright eyes, veiled by long eye-lashes, when he remembered the passage in *Anna Karenina* when on meeting Levin she exclaims: "I know thoroughbreds by their special brands, and enamoured youths by their eyes."

These honest eyes were full of rapture and unspeakable anguish at the same time. Such must have been Werther's gaze, such must be the expression of those who intend committing suicide.

Davydenko had fulfilled his promise. The elegant Caucasian silver and gold sabre which he brought to Sablin had actually been adorned with the small white cross, and a new St. George's sword-knot had been attached to the hilt. A simple narrow black Caucasian leather sword-belt was passed through the rings. The sabre rested on a dark red velvet cushion on which a dog was embroidered, and which did not exactly harmonize with the weapon it bore.

"In the name of His Imperial Majesty I have the pleasure, Lieutenant Karpoff, of presenting you with this weapon of the brave. May it be transmitted from generation to generation as a token of your valiant deed."

Karpoff's face, grown thin with the effects of his wound, flushed and he thanked Sablin with a tremulous voice.

"Do you wish me to send her a wire?" Sablin asked.

"To whom?" Karpoff inquired in a whisper.

"To Tatiana Nicholaievna," said Sablin in an undertone, so

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

that only by the movement of his lips could Karpoff guess what the General was saying.

"Yes, if you think it possible!" muttered Karpoff blushing to the roots of his hair.

"Why, of course. And you should write her a letter."

The orderly, lancer von Dahl, proceeded to fasten on the new sabre, after having unfastened the old one, while Sablin went across to the right flank Cossack who stood erect with his head turned towards his General.

"That young Karpoff is ready to die at any moment and to commit the most daring deed. He would not shrink although it meant certain death. But dare I send him?" thought Sablin and his voice quavered as he repeated the stereotyped phrase to the soldier: "In the name of His Majesty the Emperor I reward you with the St. George's cross."

His hand trembled as it disposed of the bauble.

The dinner was a great success. The pie, triumphantly brought in by the priest's wife, was baked to perfection.

The band was playing outside, and the melodious strains of the "Life for the Tsar" reminded Sablin of the Petrograd Opera House, carrying his thoughts from the tiny rooms, where a canary tried to drown the brass band and the chatter of the guests, to the distant capital.

Toasts followed one another: to His Majesty, accompanied by a thunder of applause and the mighty strains of the Russian hymn, to the new knights, with the regimental music of the hussar and Don regiments by turns, to victory and fame, to the Commanders of the regiments, to the officers, soldiers and Cossacks, to the faithful comrades on the battlefield, and finally to the hostess.

The officers, having lost the habit of drink, became merry in no time. Protopopoff, the Commander of the Don regiment, who sat on Sablin's left, rose asking to be allowed to send for the Cossack singers.

"I must tell you, Your Excellency, that he's the best singer of our regiment," he said pointing at Karpoff. "He's got such

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a fine baritone voice that he could join the opera stage at any time. You've never heard him?"

"No, never," Sablin replied dryly.

"Then you must hear him. You'll be fascinated by him. He's his mother's only son."

"Listen, listen to him," said an inward voice tempting Sablin's conscience, "learn to value him, to love him with all your might, and then sacrifice him, for sacrifice is asked of you. You'll send him to certain death? When the fatal moment has come, you'll give the command in a firm voice because you are a soldier. Is it a sin? Wherein lies the greater sin: to sacrifice him whom you love above all, with pangs of anguish and sick at heart, or to send to certain death, with a feeling of spite, him whom you dislike, who morally and physically is obnoxious to you? When sacrifice is required, it must be made in all sincerity."

"The singers are so far away. It's hardly worth the while," said Sablin.

"Oh, it's no distance," Protopopoff insisted, longing to show off before the Commander of the division and to prove the order reigning in his regiment. "Barely seven miles. They'll ride over in the twinkling of an eye. I'll have them called by telephone."

"Well, I leave it to you."

"I'll give the instructions," Davydenko put in. "Which squadron is it to be?"

"Let's say the fourth," said Protopopoff carelessly, conscious that the chorus of the 4th squadron was the best of the regiment, that they were ready to start at any moment and that the horses were all saddled. He looked forward to surprising the Commander of the division and all the guests.

Davydenko went to the telephone.

At the other end of the table Semionoff, slightly the worse for liquor, had opened the window so as to enable the guests to hear the band better and, with a jolly smile on his face, was singing, and, as he sang, winking to the priest's wife.

The dinner had come to an end. Sablin had given permis-

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

sion to smoke and retired to the window so as to avoid the constraint that his presence caused. Tea, pastry and sweets prepared by the hostess were served.

The short winter day was waning. The ruddy sun was sinking towards the dark outline of the distant forests, and the new moon showed her crescent on the pale sky, when the chorus turned up. The horses were steaming. The Cossacks had done their best and had taken but twenty minutes to ride across. A stout corporal led them into the yard and gave the command "attention." Sablin greeted them.

"May we begin?" asked the corporal.

"Go ahead."

They started by singing their old regimental field-song and when they had done, Protopopoff called on Karpoff, the young officer to sing. Karpoff who was yearning to show himself to his men in his new smart sabre with the St. George's sword-knot, hastened to obey and rushed into the yard without putting his overcoat on.

"If only she could see me now!" he thought, "it would be deuced fine to sing to her."

He felt her ring on his finger.

The Cossacks congratulated him and Sablin and many of the guests came out on the steps.

Karpoff took a whip out of the corporal's hand, to serve him as a baton, placed himself in position and, closing his eyes for a second, thought: "It's for you, for Your Imperial Highness that I am going to sing."

He sang a mournful Cossack ditty which harmonized with the sadness of the waning day and with the whole surroundings of the front, where one risked at any moment being called to the battle-field and to death. Each word of the song had a meaning, the sense of which was quite clear to all these men who had seen their comrades slain and wounded.

The song ended amid a general but appreciative silence.

"The battle charger," suggested Protopopoff with the air of an impresario, as he stood by Sablin's side.

And Karpoff sang of the ritual, which had existed from one

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generation to the other, when the Cossacks saw their next of kin off to the battle-field.

Sablin thought of the days of his youth, when he too had sung with his soldiers. Life had clutched him with its filthy claws and had carried him through torrents of insults and abjectness: Had he not done better had he died then, when he was able to sing with Lubovin and was an unstained youth, a thoroughly honest officer. Would it not be better for Karpoff to die now, when there was still so much warmth and sincerity in his voice, when he had not yet committed the slightest evil deed? Let him be a dead lion, rather than a living cur!

"Where have you learnt that song?" asked Sablin, when Karpoff had finished the long hymn of grateful love to the mother-country.

"In the Don Cadet corps of Alexander II," Karpoff replied.

"A fine song," said Sablin, musingly.

As in a dream, mechanically, and in the usual terms, he thanked the musicians and the singers, gave them the usual remuneration and dismissed them. The banquet had come to an end.

XV

ABOUT ten days later Sablin was called to the telephone. It was Sonin, the Commander of the infantry regiment, in whose sector lay the famous "Eagle's Nest." He reported that the moon was sufficiently bright to allow of examining the Kostioukhnovka position and that if his excellency had not changed his mind, would he kindly arrive on the following evening towards eight o'clock and they would proceed together to the Eagle's Nest.

"Very good, I'll come," Sablin answered.

Alone, except for his chauffeur and mechanic, and without having informed anyone of his intentions, Sablin drove in his motor-car in the dusk from the village of Ozery. He knew the way, as he had followed it in winter. But now he noticed many a change. The fine dense forest which he had admired from Rafaloffka had been nearly completely hewn down, while the

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dirty, marshy road had been carefully laid out on faggot-work. A town of dug-outs had been raised close by the river and the forest swarmed with infantry and seemed a human ant-hill. Sounds of rough but hearty laughter, of harmonicas became audible; soldiers passed along with rattling kettles attached to their knapsacks, bound for the field-kitchens. The trees were hewn at haphazard and the tree stumps, sometimes four to five feet high, stuck out like an uncouth hedge along the dug-outs. The bridge which Sablin's division had crossed with such effort existed no more. It had been replaced by a new, smartly built bridge, nearly a mile long, the work of the pontoon battalion. A second and a third pontoon-bridge were thrown across the river some way off. The whole bank of the river was dug out into timber lined trenches. This was the rear-guard of the army corps. A dense net of barbed wire sloped towards the water and was partly submerged by the swollen river.

The sentinel—a militia-man—stopped the motor-car as it neared the bridge, and let it pass after having assured himself that the inmate belonged to the "command." Sablin was surprised to notice that soldiers who passed at the same time, accompanied by Jews with bread-baskets, were not questioned by the sentinel.

"Evidently only the 'superiors' have to undergo scrutiny," Sablin decided.

The nearer Sablin approached the position, the fewer forces did he come across and the denser became the forest. The faggot-work across the marsh became narrower and was less carefully put together; the work had evidently been done in a hurry, maybe under the enemy's fire. The position beyond the forest was not yet visible but its presence was felt owing to the incessantly renewed shots.

Ta-poo, ta-poo, the Austrian shots sounded, and but seldom was the answer of our firing heard, when it echoed through the woods, seemingly close by—and followed again by the distant double ta-poo, ta-poo. To the left, close by the road, a battery was established, covered by fir branches and masked from the aeroplanes. Some distance further horses stood fastened to the

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trees in the wood, dug-outs appeared, lit by a small yellow light. The motor-car stopped and the mechanic went to inquire about the way.

"The first turning to the left," he reported. "There's a sign post."

At the corner of the first turning stood a post with a board, on which was written "To the wood-cutter's hut." Half a mile further they came upon a glade in the wood, likewise intersected with rows of dug-outs, where several transport-cars stood about. Lights shone from the windows of the half-dilapidated hut, a money-case stood by its side and a sentinel in an old overcoat paced up and down. At the sound of the motor-car Colonel Sonin appeared with a lantern in his hand.

"This way, Your Excellency," he said showing him to the entrance-door. "Look out, there's a step missing."

Sablin followed him through a narrow, dark passage to a small room, which served as dining room, study and bed-room. Three camp-beds stood along the walls and a third bed had been prepared on the naked floor; the centre of the room was taken up by a roughly carpentered table of unplanned boards and a bench. Besides there was the semblance of an arm-chair made from a log with a back and arms of twisted crooked branches. A small tin lamp stood on the table and its high flame lit up the small room, which was stuffy and hot. The inmates of the hut were having tea. A large, blue, enamelled tea-pot, old enamel jugs and slices of black bread lay scattered on the table. Three officers rose from their seats as Sablin came in.

"My adjutant, officer of the day, the quartermaster," Sonin introduced his inferiors, in an off-hand way.

The adjutant was a lanky fellow, in a summer tunic of pre-war cut covered with badges, and with warped khaki shoulder-straps and faded shoulder-knots. His face was thin, sharp and clean-shaven, with grey, melancholy eyes. His long figure kept the traces of pre-war drill and he answered Sablin's greeting with a certain graceful bow, tried to clink his spurs together and shook hands firmly.

Pyshkin, a young man with wide-open, sheepy eyes in a

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round ruddy beardless and browless face, looked at Sablin as a child would at a toy; he stretched out his soft, sweaty right hand awkwardly and did not know what to do with his left.

The quartermaster had risen from non-com. rank. He had a strict, soldier-like demeanour. His wan, sickly looking face with thin, pale lips was adorned with a reddish moustache.

"We'd better be going now while the moon is high, and we can have some supper and tea when we return," said Sonin. "Pyshkin will go with us."

Pyshkin began dressing with evident discontent.

The three of them stepped into the motor-car and drove for about two miles to where the road forked, when Sonin gave the order to stop.

"This is the Kostioukhnovka road," said he. "We'll now have to go on foot. It's not far—about two miles."

They walked to the outskirts of the forest.

"You see the position," said Sonin, stopping Sablin.

A large and tall forest sloped like a dark wall and spread out to the right and left of the sandy road. Thirty paces off small fir trees, pine and juniper trees formed a slight thicket. Further a sandy field spread to some sandy mounds. It sparkled and glistened in the rays of the moon. Two miles off appeared a new row of small thickets above which bright white rockets were incessantly flung. Some miles to the right the position became visible and it was entirely covered with the bluish white lights of these rockets. Mysterious and awe-inspiring as was the enemy's position, it became the more mysterious and enigmatic owing to these lights.

At times artillery would boom in the distance and with a lightning-like sheaf of yellow light the firing was reflected in the blue sky.

"They keep firing the whole night and the Lord only knows what at," said Sonin.

The silver and treacherous moon-light enhanced the mysteriousness of the field.

"Come on," said Sablin.

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"Come on," Sonin repeated. Pyshkin fell back, so as not to increase the target for the enemy's fire.

A bullet whizzed by and hit the earth some distance off.

"They keep firing the whole night along the road. At hazard. . . . So far no one has been touched," said Sonin.

The shots never stopped, and the whizz and singing sound; and the smacking of the bullets increased as they neared the hills.

"What fools those Austrians and Poles are," said Sonin with irritation. "As if it were possible to hit at night-time."

A bullet smacked into the sand quite close by.

"We'd better take the side of the road and separate for a while," said Sablin. "There are barely six hundred paces left."

They were approaching a long sandy mound, which intersected the road, small dug-outs in the flanks and human shadows became visible and muffled voices were heard.

This was a dead expanse, inaccessible to the enemy's bullets and one hundred and fifty human beings had lived, slept, thought and talked for a fortnight at a time, from one relief to another, on this small piece of ground. On one side small mounds, the graves of the fallen, could be noticed.

The sandy hill rose like a wall and iron-shields stood like so many teeth at both ends.

"Here we are, in the Eagle's Nest," said Sonin.

The men, lying, sitting and walking about, looked at the newcomers as though they had fallen from the moon. Then they whispered one to the other: "The Commander of the regiment" and "one had better inform the Commander of the company." But the latter, evidently forewarned by telephone, was already appearing out of a tiny dug-out. He was quite a boy, about Karpoff's age, but without any martial go in him, without any passion for war. Fair-haired and thick-lipped, he was uncouthly attired in a wadded overcoat, which made him look stout and clumsy. His eyes expressed fear and anxiety and his face was pale.

He approached the Commander of the regiment with a report, but Sonin pointed to Sablin and the youth became utterly

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confused. Calling Sablin at times "Your Excellency," at other times "Colonel," the youth reported that fort N 14 was occupied by the 9th company of the 709th infantry regiment of Tmoutarakan, that the company consisted of one officer and 127 privates, that nothing special had happened, except that six men had been wounded half an hour before by a bomb and that one soldier had been killed on the spot by a bullet in the shield embrasure.

"They've been peeping through the shields again," said Sonin discontentedly. "How often have I told you not to allow them."

"What can I do, Colonel. I've told them over and over how dangerous it was. They seem to be attracted, as by a whirlpool. Even I feel drawn to do it," said the youth with tears in his voice.

"Who got killed?" Sonin asked.

"Ovetchkin."

"Which Ovetchkin?"

"The one who came with the October reinforcement."

"He was a bad lot, Your Honour," a sergeant said respectfully, as he came forward to his Commander's assistance.

The sergeant was a short, sinewy man of forty, with black moustache and eyebrows, a wide-awake, typical Russian soldier, bold and full of common sense.

"I'll peep through, I'll peep through," he repeated, imitating Ovetchkin, "and nothing will happen. And what was the result? There he lies, like carrion."

And he pointed at the body lying some way off.

Sonin went up to the fallen soldier, doffed his cap and crossed himself.

The soldier's body, still warm and limp, lay on its back in the sand. Someone had crossed its arms on its breast. The face was horribly mutilated, the skull fractured and one eye was missing, the whole covered with coagulated blood.

"Probably a dum-dum bullet," Sonin remarked.

Two soldiers on their knees were digging a grave in the sand.

"Are you going to bury him here," Sonin inquired.

"Yes, Your Honour. It's impossible to carry him any dis-

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tance, as they are shooting incessantly," said the sergeant. "As for the wounded I'm at a loss what to do? I'll wait until the moon sets. It will be easier in the dark. Let's hope they don't groan and scream. The enemy shoots in the direction the sounds come from."

"Mind you bury him deep," said Sonin.

It all seemed so clear and usual to Sonin, to the sergeant and to the soldiers who were digging the grave. To carry the dead meant risking the lives of the living. A corpse is no good to anyone, is only a burden for the company and must be got rid of without delay. Sablin looked at the Commander of the company who, evidently, was of a different opinion. His face was livid, a cold horror lay in his kind, childish goggle eyes and his chin trembled.

"You seem to be nervous, young man," said Sablin with fatherly kindness, as he took his arm and led him away.

This attention on the part of a perfect stranger touched the youth, who suddenly burst into tears, hardly able to restrain his sobs.

"I'm frightened," he stuttered. "I'm afraid of dead bodies. I'm afraid of death and yet I'm drawn to the shield the same as he was. I understand him. Why, it's so simple: you approach the shield, you unloosen the bolt, you have a peep and you meet death. It's dreadful. This is my sixth day here and that is the fourth. . . . I see them in my dreams."

"You must rest and get calmer," said Sablin. "Where were you brought up?"

"I graduated at the commercial school. Then they began attending the officers' courses and I followed suit, not wishing to be called to the front in the rank of a private."

"How long have you been at the front?"

"Somewhat over a month."

"Who are your parents?"

"They are merchants. We have a shop in Petrograd. Our family-name is Zaitchikoff, you may have heard of us," said the company Commander, feeling calmer.

"So this is the Eagle's Nest," said Sonin as he came up. "You

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see I was right in saying 'certain death.' Let's return to my hut."

But Sablin was not satisfied with what he had seen.

He crossed the sandy mound of the hill and approached the steel shields placed in an irregular row along the hill-side. A sentinel lay motionless, with his ear pressed to the ground, close by the shields. Undoubtedly one felt drawn towards them and Sablin became conscious that he likewise was under the fascination of opening the window that closed the embrasure and having a peep at death.

Sonin remained below.

Sablin, bending his body, walked slowly past the shields and suddenly noticed a chink between them. He lay down on the ground, crept to the chink and eagerly pressed his eye to it.

The moon shone brightly. An utter chaos met his eye. Two sandy parallel hills were divided by a narrow glade which was covered with "chevaux-de-frise" interwoven with barbed wire. Stakes carelessly driven into the ground, evidently during the few minutes in which the bayonet attack had taken place, were also entangled with wire. Two yellow, dried-up corpses with black eye-sockets lay there, seemingly since the autumn. Blood-stained black rags, fragments of overcoats, boots, tins and an un-exploded bomb lay scattered about. Right opposite, at a distance of barely twenty-five paces, big iron shields were perceptible, sticking out like teeth. A rocket rose from behind them with a hissing sound and illuminated the whole dreadful picture with a livid blue light as it exploded. And all the lifeless and hideous objects were lit up by the trembling light and impressed him as being a wild nightmare. It seemed as though the corpses began to move while uncanny shadows distorted yet more the distorted faces. Sablin's heart beat fast and he had the sensation as though, in unison with his heart, the strange, dreadful heart of the enemy beat on the other side of the glade. He felt inclined to spring to his feet and to rush away.

Instead he took stock of the facts. It was sufficient to cross that small space of ground to be in among the enemies. It was,

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however, quite possible to run across. Sablin, with the cold calculation of a soldier well-versed in military matters, began to realise that it was just in that spot that it was easiest to run across to the enemy. It would hardly be necessary to cut through the "chevaux-de-frise." By putting on leather sapper-gloves, such as are worn when barbed wire is being interwoven, it would be quite simple to throw back the "cheval-de-frise," flinging hand-bombs at the same time, and to knock off the shields with the butt-ends of the guns.

"Yes, that would be quite feasible," he thought.

The first man, whom those following would look upon with bold eyes, undimmed by awe, would fall, while the others would infallibly succeed in the attempt.

But for the first man it meant certain death.

"And Karpoff would be the victim?" he mentally asked himself. And without giving an answer to his thought he sighed deeply and crept slowly back.

It seemed to him as though he had not lain there for more than one second.

"You've been a long time over there," said Sonin, who was waiting for him. "Well, what is your impression?"

Sablin gave no reply. He was afraid of speaking lest his voice should betray his emotion. He pretended not to have heard the question and slowly walked towards the company-Commander's dug-out. Sonin, Zaitchikoff and the sergeant followed him.

"May I go inside your dug-out," he finally asked, having, by strength of will, mastered his emotion.

"Please," answered Zaitchikoff with confusion.

Five small steps led to the dug-out, which was as small and narrow as a grave, so that when occupied by one man there was no room for another. A bed stood by the wall, covered with fir-branches, and by its side a small table with a burning candle. The portrait of a woman, with a simple peasant face, in a black lace cap, some crumpled periodicals and a small gospel adorned the table.

Zaitchikoff stood at the entrance of the dug-out.

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"That's my mother," he said in a low melancholy voice, as Sablin's eye fell on the portrait. "This is the life we lead," he added.

The dug-out smelt of damp and fir,—the smell of a grave.

"It's no joke living under such conditions for a fortnight, especially with the feeling of being drawn to every shield, longing to peep at life to come."

Sablin bade farewell to Zaitchikoff and left the Eagle's Nest with Sonin. Now he hardly noticed the whizz of the bullets and only once, when a bullet hit the ground at his very feet, he exclaimed: "Damn the thing!"

The wood-cutter's hut had been tidied. The table was covered for two; clean glasses, a tin of sardines, some pickled salmon and a dish of biscuits were placed upon it. The quartermaster was busy behind the door and the smell of a roasted hen issued from that direction.

The sleepy adjutant with the withered, indifferent-looking face reported that a new casualty had taken place at the Eagle's Nest.

"I know," said the Commander, "Ovetchkin."

"No, Sir. A new one, since you left. The Company-Commander Zaitchikoff.

"How did it happen?" Sablin and Sonin exclaimed simultaneously.

"The usual way. He could not keep away from the shield, he opened the embrasure and looked through for two minutes, according to the sergeant's report."

"Good Lord! Poor fellow!" said Sonin crossing himself. "Whom shall I put in his place?"

"There's no one but Wertzinsky left," replied the adjutant.

"Come, come! Wertzinsky?" exclaimed Sonin with indignation.

"Take my word, Colonel, men of that sort are more likely to withstand the temptation. He, at least, won't give in to the feeling of fascination. Besides, there's no one else."

"Excuse me, Your Excellency," Sonin said, addressing

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Sablin. "Won't you have some food. Quartermaster," he cried, "is the hen ready?"

"In a moment, Sir," a voice answered from behind the door.

"He's a jack of all trades," Sonin explained. "But where's Pyshkin?" he remembered of a sudden.

"He has been back for half an hour," the adjutant replied.

"The devil he has! He's a spoilt child you know, and of no good to me. Take a seat, Your Excellency, and I'll fetch some 'Vodka.' "

But Sablin refused to stay. His nerves had given way and he longed for solitude.

As they were passing the battery, a tire blew out and the car stopped.

"I thought something would happen, after that damned hare crossed the road," Petroff grumbled. "One minute, Your Excellency, we'll put on a fresh tire."

"I'll take a stroll meanwhile," said Sablin as he left the motor-car.

The full-moon was setting. The small fir trees and juniper bushes took a mysterious aspect. Sablin could not forget Zaitchikoff with his round face and simple grey goggle eyes.

"A Company-Commander," thought Sablin. "The responsible leader of a hundred and fifty peasants turned into soldiers. That timid child at such a dangerous and important position, thirty paces from the enemy, where an attack could be expected at any moment, bringing with it, perchance, the forcing of the position and a break down of the entire front! The whole front depended on Ensign Zaitchikoff, afraid of corpses and of the enemy, who sobbed like a child and yet was drawn to have a look at death and to unveil the secrets of life to come."

"And who is no more," someone said by the road-side in a doleful, melancholy voice.

Sablin shuddered, lifted his head and looked about nervously. To the left of the road, amid the small fir trees and juniper bushes, lay a nameless soldier's grave. There were any amount of similar graves in that forest, where continual fights had taken place during the autumn. Sablin had noticed it on his way to

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the wood-cutter's hut. A small fir-wood cross, with a soldier's cap fixed to it, surmounted the grave. Now someone was sitting on it, embracing the cross and looking at Sablin with a blank gaze. The right side of the face was besmeared with something black. The setting moon looked straight in the face of the strange apparition and the small clouds, that floated in the sky, threw passing shadows on it. Sablin felt certain that Zaitchikoff had appeared to him. But how could that be Zaitchikoff? How could Zaitchikoff's body happen to be here, and could lifeless Zaitchikoff speak? This escaped Sablin's mind at the moment. However, even later on, Sablin's impression that the figure was really Zaitchikoff's and that he had spoken to him, did not vanish.

"You killed him and what for?"

"How could I have killed him?" Sablin thought.

"You were kind to him. You studied his soul. How could you do so in such a place," said that someone who seemed to be Zaitchikoff. "And the soul escaped the body. Sonin, in his rough way, knows better than you how to act, whereas you found nothing wiser to do, than to irritate an open wound and with what result? You looked at his mother's portrait. How could you remind him of his mother while he was standing on the edge of an abyss, ready to fling himself into it? And do you now intend sending Karpoff to his fate?"

"If necessary I'll do it," Sablin thought.

"Mind, if you send him, don't mention a word to him of death, of his mother, or of her. Though conscious yourself that certain death lies in store for him, pretend that it is not so, that he will have to commit a bold deed, as is usual in warfare, that the mission is a dangerous one, but leave him faith in a favourable result. Do you understand? Don't send him without faith. It would be cruel."

The voice grew more and more distant. Zaitchikoff moved slightly, as though intending to rise. Sablin was on the point of fainting.

The sound of the motor-car, not far off, brought him to his senses again. Sablin forced himself to look at the grave.

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An old soldier's cloak, black with age and damp, that he had not noticed before, hung on the cross and was now lit up by the bright light of the motor lamps.

"Step in, Your Excellency," said Poliakoff, as he opened the motor-car door.

"What a distance you've walked," Poliakoff went on, "we had begun to feel anxious. What an awful forest. And this nameless grave. An uncanny spot!"

"Don't talk rot," said Sablin, seating himself in the car.

He kept silent for the rest of the time. It was late at night when he got back home. The stars twinkled modestly above the lake. The ice cracked under the night-frost; cocks were heard crowing hoarsely.

Sablin felt sick and broken.

"My nerves are playing the devil with me," he thought as he turned up in the morning in the messroom, where Doctor Oospensky was having tea. "Hadn't I better ask Oospensky? Maybe I need bromide."

XVI

TOWARDS the end of April the Nth army corps underwent a new grouping for the attack. Sablin's division was transferred nearer to the river and was bivouacked in the woods. By the concentration of the reserves Sablin realized that it would be unnecessary to sacrifice Karpoff, that Zinovieff's point of view had triumphed, that Kostioukhnovka would be left in peace and that an attempt at breaking the front was planned at Vulka-Galooriiskaja.

For three days and three nights the Russian heavy and light artillery bombarded the enemy's position, shelling the forests, smashing the branches and digging up acres of land. The enemy followed suit, and, collecting the last available reserves, sent them with feverish rapidity to the front in order to paralyze the Russian tactics. On the fourth day long columns of soldiers arose from the trenches and grey human beings crossed the mysterious boundary and proceeded to the enemy's trenches. They passed through a dense forest, making their way through

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thickets of young trees while invisible machine-guns and rifles mowed their ranks and the ranks grew thinner and thinner. Many of the men turned back in the forest and dispersed imperceptibly and, when the forces reached the barbed wire, their number was insufficient for risking an assault. The 170th and 180th divisions stopped and proceeded to entrench themselves. A break in the planned attack took place and the assault had to be postponed. The Hungarian dismounted cavalry and the German militia, rapidly forwarded from the Verdun front, repelled the Russian attack. On the fifth day orders were issued to return to the original position, so as to avoid useless bloodshed. The shattered divisions returned to those very trenches that they had occupied in winter, to those loathsome dug-outs whither they now carried the slain, and graveyards. The losses sustained by both divisions were very heavy and exceeded one half of the entire formation. The regimental Commanders had fallen, four were wounded and nearly all the officers were killed. The vacancies ought to have been filled, and the forces should have been sent to the rear, but this, for the time being, was impracticable. All the available troops had been forwarded to the front: the Russian army was saving Verdun, rescuing Paris. Russian officers and soldiers were perishing in the forests of Poliessie and Volhynia, so as to enable their French allies to hold out on the banks of the Rhine.

The dreadful summer of 1916 was nearing. In May Lossovsky's army corps was regrouped, and two Cossack divisions joined it. The supreme command insisted on the enemy's front being broken at all hazards. Lossovsky planned to carry through the attempt at Kostioukhovka and informed Sablin that he counted on his placing an officer and ten men at his disposal to lead the infantry to the attack.

"You'll understand," he said to Sablin who had been called to the army corps headquarters, "that after our April failure the present attempt is of the greatest importance. Why didn't we listen to you then! What put us off was your being the only one who did not belong to the general-staff. So you'll send me someone to be relied upon?"

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"I'll do my duty," said Sablin and returned to his bivouac.

Sablin's dug-out was very small. It had been made in winter for the Commander of an infantry regiment. It had a deal floor and deal walls. A small window with four panes of glass, on a level with the ground, let in a dim light. It was furnished with a camp-bed, a table for Sablin's papers and a wooden case serving as a seat. The noise from the bivouacs, the singing and music of the camp was hardly audible in this subterranean dwelling, with its low roof covered by ten inches of earth, like a grave.

Sablin was seated on the wooden case, his back leaning against the table and looking at a small image of Christ hanging above his bed. That image, richly worked in gold and precious stones had served his grandparents to bless his father at the latter's wedding and had done the same service on the day of his marriage with Vera Constantinovna.

He had just dismissed Karpoff, and remembered every word that he had said to him and Karpoff's answers, delivered in a soldier-like, disciplined tone.

"Select ten bold Cossacks, ready for any emergency," Sablin had said. "The Commander of your regiment has been forewarned. Come with them to me tonight at eight p.m. Do you know, Kostioukhovka?"

"Yes, Your Excellency," Karpoff replied calmly and clearly.

"And the Eagle's Nest?"

"I know. I'll find it."

"I need a deed of valour, Lieutenant Karpoff."

"I'll do my duty," Karpoff replied still more calmly.

Sablin showed the disposition of the forces on the map.

Karpoff fetched his map out of his field-pouch and sketched the trenches on it.

"You'll have to carry away the infantry by your pluck. Have a look at the disposition. It's easy work. . . . Twenty-five paces only. . . . The 'chevaux-de-frise' are easy to push aside. . . . Provide yourselves with gloves from the sapper section. . . . Don't forget hand grenades. . . . Is it clear?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

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"Don't look through the embrasures of the shields, they are a fixed mark for the enemy's machine-guns. However, on the left side you'll find a chink between the shields. Creep to it and study the disposition. Two corpses have been lying there ever since the autumn. I saw them in winter but now they are probably quite putrefied. Just above them stands a loose 'cheval-de-frise.' Knock it aside and shout 'hurrah.' The shields can easily be overturned with your rifle butts or can even be cleared. The infantry will follow you: the Tmootarakan regiment. You understand? A deed of valour and the St. George's cross as a reward."

"Your instructions will be accurately carried out, Your Excellency."

Sablin kept silent.

"May I go?" asked Karpoff.

"Yes, please."

One—two—and Karpoff turned on his right heel, clinked his spurs, opened the door and retired.

While the door was open the sounds of a waltz, played by the band some way off, were distinctly heard, followed by complete silence, as it closed behind the young man.

After what seemed a long while, someone knocked.

"Who's there?" Sablin exclaimed.

"Your orderly, Your Excellency. Lieutenant Karpoff is waiting outside with the Cossacks."

"Very good."

Sablin all of sudden felt certain that nothing was going to happen to Karpoff, that the Poles would bolt from the trenches and would miss him and that tomorrow they would all return safe and sound.

Sablin looked at Christ's image with thankful eyes as he left the dug-out. It was a clear evening. Sixteen mounted Cossacks and an officer stood twenty paces from the dug-out on the sandy road. The faces of the Cossacks were freshly washed and their hair curled in ringlets. They wore new tunics and wide trousers with red side-stripes, and their boots were brightly polished. They were consciously ready for their last review—a

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death review. And yet their demeanour was bold, sedate and joyful. As for Karpoff, he beamed with exultation and with the importance of his mission, as he sat erect on his elegant chestnut on the right flank.

"Welcome, my lads," said Sablin in a firm voice.

The Cossacks answered the greeting.

"You'll have to help the infantry. Go along and God speed you! Begin at eleven sharp," cried Sablin, as the Cossacks, to the cry of: "To your service, Your Excellency," rode past him, three in a row, on their fidgeting horses.

Karpoff rode up to Sablin, who shuddered as a vague presentiment of something mysteriously evil overcame him. He looked at the young officer with anxiety. But the latter wore an expression of calm determination, with that disciplined consciousness of the importance of every detail in the accomplishment of his duty, which years of training inculcate.

"Allow me to verify my watch by yours, Your Excellency," he said simply.

"Six minutes past eight," Sablin replied.

Karpoff looked at his wrist.

"That's what I make it too," he said; and, setting his horse at a canter, he overtook the head of his small detachment in three bounds.

Sablin turned back abruptly and went staggering to his dug-out. He banged the door and threw himself on his camp-bed. The dug-out was quiet and as dark as a grave.

Karpoff pressed his eye to the chink in the shield. Five minutes before, his favourite Cossack, Alpatoff, the best regimental singer, decorated with three grades of the St. George's cross, who had hoped in this action to obtain the fourth grade, a golden cross on a bow, had been killed, without the slightest use for the action.

When they had reached the Eagle's Nest they had asked the infantry to explain the disposition to them. The company Commander did not come forward.

"He's sitting in the dug-out and refuses to leave it. Ever since he arrived here, three days ago, he has buried himself in

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the dug-out and hasn't shown himself. He funks it," said a corporal.

The soldiers surrounded the Cossacks joyfully, as though this small detachment, destined to lead them to the assault, were bullet-proof. The Cossacks seemed in high spirits, were smartly equipped and made their dispositions knowingly and with great calm. They took off their sabres, for fear of their being in their way, and put them aside.

"We'll take them 'after the action.'"

They seemed quite confident of their success although they had prepared for certain death and had arrayed themselves in fresh tunics.

They distributed hand-grenades and decided the part that each of them would take upon himself; each of them had a peep through the chink and noted the direction that he would have to follow.

"Now, infantry, mind you, don't hold back; come to the rescue!"

And the infantry-men, who but an hour before had inwardly determined not to rise for the assault, answered gaily:

"No fear, we shan't leave you in the lurch! The Tmootra-kan regiment knows its duty. We have served our apprenticeship in the Masurian forests."

"That's right," said Karpoff. "I start first, then my men and you follow suit. Have you got it, you devils?"

"Devil yourself," said a gloomy-looking fellow of the reserves, with a laugh. "Don't you worry. We are likely to get ahead of you."

"That I call an officer! It's a pleasure to follow him to the assault!"

"A splendid chap."

"Who's your company Commander?" Karpoff inquired.

"Lieutenant Wertzinsky. He has been wounded. Absolutely no good," answered the soldier from the reserves, feeling very dignified by the side of the Cossacks.

"Wertzinsky! I remember him. Well, all right," thought Karpoff. "We'll have a talk with him later on. Let him see

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now what real pure love means and to what valiant deeds it urges one!"

"Look through the chink," the soldiers said to the Cossacks, "the enemy has not yet noticed it. Looking through the embrasure would mean certain death."

"Certain death!" exclaimed Alpatoff. "That's Tommy rot! I don't funk it: there's no risk."

And before Karpoff could say a word, Alpatoff had approached the shield.

"Alpatoff, don't tempt God! It's sinful," said Sergeant Zemskoff.

But Alpatoff was carried away by the desire of challenging death in the presence of the infantry. He opened the shield with a decisive gesture and shoved his face into the embrasure. At the same moment a shot was fired on the other side and Alpatoff fell back with a shattered head.

The Cossacks carried his body to one side and covered it with a soldier's cape.

"We'll take him along with us 'later on,'" they said, "and bury him in a respectable way."

The infantry gazed at them with surprise. These fellows were on the verge of certain death and never for one moment thought of death, so confident were they of 'later on.'

Karpoff lay down on the ground to examine the position. The night was dark. The moon's disk had only just begun to show on the horizon, but rockets were being shot very often. The enemy seemed conscious of the pending danger and shot them one after the other lighting up the space between the trenches with a dead blue quavering light, which made everything visible. The corpses that Sablin had mentioned had decayed and fallen to pieces, and their dark-brown skulls, their ribs and bones, covered here and there by half-mouldered rags, met his eye. The "cheval-de-frise" stood above them but it was fastened to a stake and did not seem easy to push back.

"It can be done," thought Karpoff, estimating the height. He pictured to himself the deed of daring through a prism of life and not of death. "The breaking through of the enemy's

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front succeeded owing to Lieutenant Karpoff's deed of daring, who was first to assault the enemy with a hand-grenade," was the report that he read with his mind's eye. And *she* would read it likewise.

He admitted that he might be wounded and even severely injured. So much the better: that would bring him back to the hospital and to her, but he never for one moment thought of the possibility of being killed. He prepared beforehand his every action. In his left hand the rifle, in his right hand—the bomb. The sabre attached behind his back. He could not make up his mind to part with it: he was confident that it would bring him luck. "I'll clear the 'cheval-de-frise,' then, after hurling the first shell, I shall detach a second shell from my belt and make it follow. The next move will be to get the rifle into my right hand . . . and trust in God." He did not pray, the words failing him and a chaos of thoughts not giving him time to recall them to his mind. She stood above all. He saw her vividly. He felt the softness of her tender lips on his eyelids. The Imperial daughter's farewell kiss made him languish and burned him through and through. Karpoff gave minute instructions to each of his Cossacks, talked the matter over with the infantry and lay, watch in hand, in excited expectation.

"How beautiful is the Almighty's creation," he thought with a sigh. "How glorious is life."

He felt the joy of living in his every muscle, in every fibre of his body. He looked up at the sky.

The sky was transcendent with its lace of silvery clouds, now slowly approaching, now suddenly withdrawing from the moon, amid the modest, slightly twinkling stars.

"How glorious," he repeated, and then suddenly looked again at his watch. The hands showed one minute to eleven. The Cossacks lay by his side in a state of tension. The company stood behind, ready for action, and a reserve battalion had approached and could be dimly descried in long even columns through the mist that covered the low-land.

Suddenly a feeling of unutterable awe overcame him. His body felt limp. The blood stopped in his veins and his muscles

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weakened. Karpoff had become conscious that death lay in wait on the other side. Death, a dirty skull and ribs on a crooked backbone.

He realized, that he would not go for anything in the world. That he could not advance.

What for?

He longed to pray, but he could not.

"Lord have mercy upon me," he whispered with trembling lips, and for a moment lost all consciousness.

"Your Honour! Time's up!" said Zemskoff in an undertone, but imperatively.

"Is it?" he asked with dry lips and rose to his feet.

But he could not move.

Then suddenly, with an impatient movement, he pulled her ring from his finger and flung it across towards the enemy with the thought, that he'd find it "later on." With a livid face and vacant eyes Karpoff rushed across the shields. He did not shout himself, but the Cossacks followed with a thundering "hurrah" which was echoed by the infantry and was distinctly heard miles off. And it announced to Sablin's division, anxiously awaiting in the camp, and to Lossoffsky in his armoured post of observation, that the enemy's position had been broken through and that the Tmootarakan regiment now occupied Kostioukhovka.

"Get up, get up, lads! Saddle!" shouted the soldiers on duty in the three cavalry divisions of the camp.

That shout meant the victory of the infantry. The majority of the soldiers were not asleep, but lay under their overcoats and sheep-skins, only trying to keep themselves warm and to forget their anxious thoughts.

The squadrons and companies fell in, the machine-gun sections, with a rattle of wheels over the forest-mounds and roots, trotted up behind the ranks of the soldiers and Cossacks.

XVII

"YOUR Excellency," said Semionoff entering Sablin's dug-out, "the division is ready. Will you give orders to start?"

He was persuaded that Sablin was awake and that he was

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cognizant of the news that was known to the entire division, and was therefore surprised to hear Sablin's quiet and even breathing. Semionoff struck a match and lighted a candle. Sablin lay ready-dressed on his camp-bed and slept soundly. He did not even hear Semionoff's words.

"Awake, Your Excellency!" Semionoff cried urgently and raising his voice. "It's high time."

Sablin, opening his eyes, gradually came to his senses and sat up on his bed.

"What's happened?" he inquired.

"According to a telephone message from the army headquarters the front at Kostioukhnovka has been broken through. Kostioukhnovka is in our hands, any amount of prisoners and munitions have been seized and the enemy is fleeing. The cavalry has been ordered to charge into the gap. Our division has received orders to take the lead."

"How about Karpoff?" Sablin was on the point of inquiring, but he dared not.

"Which regiment do you wish to go first?" asked Semionoff.

Without replying, Sablin proceeded to put on his coat and accoutrements. An orderly, who had just come in, helped him.

"Give me my cigarettes and matches."

Semionoff looked at him with surprise.

"Pack up the things. Mind that tea's handy. Perhaps the brandy."

He lifted his face, looked Semionoff straight in the eyes and, noticing confusion in his gaze, pulled himself together and became the old Sablin again, such as Semionoff knew him.

"Let's go," he said, "the lancers will form the advance. Are the Commanders of the regiments assembled?"

"They are waiting. Your Excellency."

It was past two a.m. and the moon soared high above the forest when the lancers on their big bay horses filed past Sablin. The soldiers were silent and their faces looked pale by the light of the moon. Their khaki caps were drawn over their ears. The Commander of the regiment, Colonel Karpinsky, stood be-

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hind Sablin on a nervous thoroughbred, waiting until his regiment had filed past.

"Well, God speed you," said Sablin. "I'll follow you."

Karpinsky cantered to the head of his regiment while Sablin waited for a while and then placed himself at the head of the hussar regiment.

They rode calmly as far as the position. The battle-field was quite still: no firing was heard and no rockets were to be seen. Only in the far distance a booming of artillery became audible.

At the edge of the forest they dismounted and, after a short rest, resumed their way at a trot along the Kostioukhnovka road that Sablin had taken the first time he had walked with Sonin to the Eagle's Nest. They overtook a long column of field-kitchens and a light battery.

The Eagle's Nest remained to the right, the Kostioukhnovka road taking a turn to the left.

It was beginning to dawn. The hills of the enemy's position showed in the pale morning dusk. The barbed-wire appeared with gaps in between and the lancers were seen filling up the trenches to enable them to continue their way. The road sloped to a place marked on the plan as the "Kostioukhnovka manor," which had been burned down the summer before. The bushes of the garden had grown and dark chimneys and the stone-walls stuck out from amid the green. A dressing-station had been established close by the road. Wounded soldiers, partly lying on the ground, partly sitting, were exchanging their experiences of the night. The killed lay to one side, covered by canvas.

Sablin had not the courage to inquire about Karpoff's fate. He looked at the canvas with uneasiness, as though he wished to ascertain what lay under it. He wished to believe that Karpoff was alive but feared to learn the truth. About half a mile off, beyond the trenches, a small town had been built by the enemy. The Russian infantry had concentrated beyond it. A crowd of Hungarians in dark-brown cavalry cloaks stood by, surrounded by the soldiers. It was the sixth Honved regiment, which had been captured together with its Commander and all

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its officers. Some way off stood captured Austrian guns, closely examined by an inquisitive crowd.

Sablin hurried his division. The whole work had been done by the infantry. As it was they had come late; and now Karpinsky with his lancers had come to a dead stop.

"Heaven knows what he's doing," said Sablin impatiently as he galloped forward. The lancers were standing in the middle of the road, talking gaily.

"Have you seen their big guns?"

"What a number of fallen enemies! The trenches are full of them!"

"Let the division Commander pass!"

"Room for the division Commander! Keep to your right!"

Sablin made his way to the bridge and waded through a small river overgrown with grass and rushes to an even space, where Karpinsky stood talking to an infantry officer. Now began again that awe-inspiring expanse between the two armies which it was so difficult to cross.

"What's up, Colonel Karpinsky," Sablin inquired endeavouring to be calm but conscious that his heart was beating fast and that his blood was rushing to his face.

Karpinsky, a lean fair-haired fellow, clean-shaven and with glasses on his nose, turned towards Sablin, and, saluting him, slowly and distinctly said that he was examining the disposition.

The infantry officer came up to Sablin and delivered his report. He was wet up to his chest and his trousers and tunic, black with water and mud, stuck to his body. He held a rifle in his hands and had a cartridge-pouch attached to his belt. His grey eyes looked attentively, though dismally and with indifference, at Sablin's well-groomed and well-fed horse, at its bright bridle and clean saddle, as though making a comparison with his own.

"The enemy, Your Excellency," the infantry Captain began, "is concentrating about two miles hence on the outskirts of a forest. It is German infantry," he emphasised with respect, "about a battalion at present, perhaps more. An enemy's battery of heavy artillery is disposed about one mile off, to the

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right of the village Letitchovka. They've evidently not yet had time to clear it. It is covered by the Germans in possession of the village. The battery is likewise a German one. I've just been remarking to the Colonel that he cannot advance any further: it's advisable to retire and wait."

"You mention a battery under cover," said Sablin nervously pulling at his moustache. "Are there any trenches and barbed wire?"

"No, the place is level. The battery lies behind the houses and the men are in the houses."

"You say there's about one battalion?"

"I think that's about all. I was told by a peasant that they'd come from the railway-station at a run."

"And what fences are there to the right and to the left?"

"That I cannot tell. According to the peasant, the Austrian troops are bolting and are being held back by the Germans. I expect them to proceed to a counter-attack within the next hour and have therefore sent for reinforcements. My company consists of sixty men only."

Sablin's face took an expression of firm determination.

"Lancers forward!" he exclaimed. Patrols at a field-gallop to right and left."

Karpinsky shrugged his shoulders and, backing his horse, gave room to the lancers who, obeying the orders of the division Commander, rushed at full speed down the steep bank of the river.

The rising sun appeared like a fiery red ball behind the neighbouring forest, throwing its scarlet rays through the dust raised by the foremost squadron. At the same moment a vivid light and a white cloud were seen above the squadron, followed by the dull detonation of a heavy gun which echoed along the valley. The firing of the battery continued, accompanied by that of the infantry and of the machine-guns, and bullets whizzed past the squadrons as they ascended the bank of the river.

Colonel Karpinsky overtook his squadrons. His face was livid and his eyes shone from under his glasses.

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Sablin waited below, letting the lancer squadrons go past him as they rushed on, excited by the engagement. He then rode behind them and surveyed the road.

Despite the hot fire of the battery and of the infantry, and, notwithstanding that several men and horses had been killed, Karpinsky continued leading his column at a trot, raising a cloud of dust, which saved him, as the enemy, aiming at the dust, missed the squadrons.

"Why the hell is he lagging," Sablin exclaimed, when the second and third squadrons abruptly turned towards the battery and dispersed along the ploughed field taking the direction of the village whence the battery fired unceasingly.

The remaining squadrons followed suit, ready for the charge, and the whole field was soon covered with galloping horses, the machine-gun section in the rearguard.

Sablin heaved a sigh of relief and pulled up his horse. He was accompanied by their Chief-of-Staff, and by his orderlies and buglers. The intensified infantry-fire in the direction taken by the lancers, the silence of the artillery, and the hurrah of his men made it evident to him that the charge had been successful and that the battery was taken. He was on the point of galloping towards the village when Semionoff's excited cry made him look back. From his left and from his rear, not far off, German soldiers were running towards him. He could distinctly see their low helmets, their knapsacks and short grey figures. Bullets began to crackle close by and it became evident that the Germans' intention was to cut off Sablin from the river and to attack the lancers from the rear. Just then Baron Weber's smart figure appeared close by on his broad gray mare. The Commander of the hussars was followed by two buglers and an adjutant.

"Hussars!" shouted Sablin. "Charge the infantry."

Weber looked back, pulled up his horse and, drawing his wide sabre out of its scabbard, waited for the first ranks.

"First squadron right turn," he commanded. "Form half-squadrons," he went on, pointing to the Germans.

The Germans stopped and opened a furious fire. Gray horses

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fell heavily to the ground, made efforts to rise falling back again, while their riders endeavoured to free their legs from under them but the bulk of the regiment galloped on with uplifted sabres which glistened in the sun.

"Surrender," cried the hussars. But the firing went on. The heavy sabres crashed against the enemies' skulls, the lances pierced their bodies through to the knapsacks, bringing them to the ground. The field gradually quieted down.

Sablin remained on the same spot, holding back Leda excited by the charge, and waiting for the final result.

A hussar ensign cantered up to him. His horse's chest was covered with blood and his sabre was besmeared with half-clotted blood mingled with sand. His face was pale as a sheet and his eyes burned like coals.

"I have cut down fourteen, Your Excellency," he exclaimed, saluting Sablin with his blood-besmeared sabre and pulling up his horse with a jerk.

"That's not your blood, I hope? You're not wounded?" Sablin inquired.

"No, Your Excellency. That's the enemy's blood," replied the ensign with pride. "My horse has been slightly grazed by a bayonet, but there's not much harm done," he went on with a grim expression, as his teeth showed under his moustache.

Sablin rode at a foot-pace across the field towards the village that had been besieged by the lancers. The field was empty. The village-road was entrenched on both sides by steep-banked ditches, along which lay numerous bodies of slain men and horses. The bodies of the men had not yet lost the beauty of life. There they lay, scattered about in their blue breeches with white stripe and shirts girdled with white belts. The big dark-bay horses lay motionless, protruding their bellies and with their black tails spread out behind. Sablin somehow felt a deep pity for the horses.

Semionoff was busy counting the bodies.

"How many have you counted?" asked Sablin wearily.

"Thirty-four horses and, so far, sixteen lancers," was the reply.

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Sablin cleared the ditches and rode beyond the village, where, four hundred paces off, dismounted lancers were crowding together; two squadrons stood in a reserve column and two were dispersing towards the forest.

Colonel Karpinsky, noticing Sablin, came up to him at a canter. His face beamed.

"Your Excellency," he reported, saluting Sablin with his drawn sabre, "the Nth lancers are happy to be able to present Your Excellency with four heavy guns, sixteen horses and forty German prisoners, seized in the cavalry charge. As you are aware, I led the charge myself," he added with importance.

Sablin collected the division at Letichovka with the view of giving it a further mission. He was surrounded by enthusiastic rejoicings. The regiments trotted up on the huge field still covered with fresh corpses, the horse-batteries rattled as they came up in the rear and all the troops were in the highest of spirits. The losses had been forgotten, for, had there been none, the victory would have lost its interest and would have seemed stale.

Shortly four squares—chestnut, bay, gray and light bay—formed up on the field. Sablin rode up to congratulate the division on the victory and trophies, and to thank the men. He called up the regimental Commanders and explained the next move consisting in following up the enemy, and proceeded to make inquiries about the casualties.

"We had no losses," said the Commander of the dragoon regiment, as though excusing himself. "The regiment did not join in the fray."

"Captain Molodkin and Lieutenant Sateplinsky—killed; ensigns Foofaïevsky and Lotoff—wounded. Eighteen lancers killed, nine wounded. Fifty-two horses killed," reported Colonel Karpinsky, making a display of the round sums. "All these casualties took place during the charge on the battery, which was led by me personally," and he backed his horse to make room for the Commander of the hussar regiment.

"Captain Kholen and Captain Spokoïsky, both of them squadron Commanders, Lieutenants Sientzoff and Joosephovitch, Ensigns Nicolsky and Rotoff—killed; Lieutenant Lensky and

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Ensign Lossieff wounded. Fifty-six hussars killed, eighty-six wounded. One hundred twelve horses killed, and over six hundred German infantry-men slain," reported Baron Weber.

After him Colonel Protopopoff advanced.

"The regiment took no active part in the charge," he said with dignity. "Lieutenant Karpoff and ten Cossacks were killed while storming on foot the enemy's position at the head of the Tmootarakan regiment," he added in a casual tone of voice.

"How? Killed?" Sablin exclaimed.

"Lieutenant Karpoff by five bullets, two in the head, one in the stomach and two in the legs, on the summit of our entrenchment, five Cossacks at the barbed-wire fencing and the others by bayonets in the enemy's trenches."

"God have mercy on their souls," murmured Sablin.

A shadow of sadness covered his features but there was no time to be lost on sentiment. The dragoon regiment had just started forward when the orderly of the army corps Commander came to fetch Sablin on the request of General Lossoffsky. He was close by in the small town of the Polish legionaries. Sablin obeyed unwillingly.

Motor-cars and saddled horses stood in readiness in front of a spacious barrack. The Commander of the army corps and his staff, the division Commander and the Commanders of the infantry regiments sat at a table covered with various dishes and food, the booty taken from the Poles, and were having tea.

Lossoffsky rose to greet Sablin.

"I congratulate you most heartily, dear Alexander Nicolaievitch," he exclaimed with a loud voice, embracing Sablin. "It's to you, my dear friend, that we are indebted for the breaking through of the enemy's position and for the brilliant victory! And with no losses, so to speak! Semeon Dmitritch, what were the casualties in the 177th division?" he asked turning to Zinovieff.

"Six officers and one hundred sixty-five soldiers killed and wounded."

"What do you say to that? That's what one can call a bril-

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liant action! Over eight thousand prisoners have already been counted. Where are your valiant men?"

"According to our plan they have been sent on by me to Manioorovka."

"Are they far off?"

"No, close by."

"Then have them stopped. I'll go and thank them. Fancy their having captured a heavy battery! Regular heroes, my friend!"

That evening Sablin, seated in the small but cosily furnished barracks of an Hungarian Colonel now occupied by him and his staff, wrote a letter to the Grand Duchess Tatiana Nicholaievna. He depicted in strong colors the complicated disposition of the battle, the inevitability of sacrifice, the importance and majesty of Lieutenant Karpoff's valiant deed, who had blindly gone to certain death, trying at the same time to make himself understood by a young girl, a child nearly:

"That youth, animated by a boundless devotion to your August Father and by a tender and grateful love of you, Your Imperial Highness, for the tender care full of self-denial shown by you towards him in her Majesty's hospital, decided to give up his life for your sake. Sent by me to assault the enemy's position, he requested me to inform you, Tatiana Nicholaievna, that he rejoiced at being able to die for you with your name on his lips. He was killed by five bullets as he led his men to the assault of the enemy's position."

After writing these words, Sablin threw his pen aside and fell to meditating.

Practically he was killed without having done anything special. Where does his heroic deed come in? And what is heroism?

"Is it a deed of heroism, for instance, to slaughter fourteen men in the heat and excitement of the battle as that blood-be-smeared ensign had done, who rode up to him after the charge of the hussars?

"Was it a deed of heroism on the part of that beautiful youth, who rose to cross the awe-inspiring boundary and fell, struck

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by five bullets before having achieved anything? Did he feel the five wounds or was he killed by the first bullet, insensible to the others?

"Was it heroism on the part of Karpinsky, who boasts of his deed, to have, against his will, pale as he was and evidently in a state of mental depression, followed his squadrons to the battery? For that deed he will be rewarded with the St. George's cross!

"Or did heroism lie in those mental tortures undergone by himself in the sufferings caused him with regard to all those who had fallen that day by his will and order?"

XVIII

"A LETTER for you, Tatiana Nicholaievna," said Sister Valentine, to the Grand Duchess, in that very hospital reception-room where Tatiana Nicholaievna had, the previous autumn, slipped the ring on Karpoff's finger.

"From whom," she asked.

"From General Sablin. You hardly expected it?"

"Yes. He's a hero, Valentine Ivanovna. He has again distinguished himself in a cavalry charge and captured heavy artillery. What a pity that he avoids Papa and Mamma. And all owing to that accursed Grigori. Let us read the letter together."

They sat down by the wide-open window. The sun shone brilliantly and the summer-morning was warm and gay.

"Fancy," said the Grand Duchess, looking up at Sister Valentine, "General Sablin writes that Karpoff has been killed. You remember, Karpoff, who was in our hospital. It seems that he died the death of a hero for my sake. He used to give such good descriptions of Cossack-life and of the war.

"The Lord have mercy on his soul," said Sister Valentine, crossing herself. "Of course I remember him. I nursed him myself. . . . He had a small black moustache. He wrote you during Lent, that he had been rewarded with the St. George's sabre. Do you remember?"

"Why certainly! He was so bashful and good. I made him

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a present of a ring and Mamma of a Gospel. He was a bachelor, however, Valentine Ivanovna, and had no children."

"Yes, of course he was a bachelor. Quite a youth and as innocent as a child."

"It's better that he should have been killed, than someone who would have left a family behind, poor wretched children. Isn't it true, Valentine Ivanovna, that it's better for the Government when bachelors perish?"

"It's always sad when anyone is killed," said Sister Valentine with a stifled sigh. "Personally I always pity the young ones more than the others. Their whole life lay before them. He was so devoted to you and to the Emperor. Such men are specially to be valued at the present time."

Tatiana Nicholaievna looked with dread at Sister Valentine.

Of late there was an indefinable atmosphere of anxiety in the palace, at Supreme Headquarters and in the hospital itself.

"Do you remember his Christian name, Sister Valentine?" the Grand Duchess asked. "I want to make a note of it for my prayers for the dead."

"Alexis," Sister Valentine answered as she rose to her feet and left the room.

Tatiana Nicholaievna looked at her with surprise and then, suddenly, ran out of the reception-room. "I must show the letter to Mamma, to Olga, to Mary and to Nastia. It's after all very well that officers die so heroically. It's a proof that they are devoted to their monarch!" she thought, as she ran down the stairs to the dining room where the Empress and Sister Olga were always to be found at that time of the day.

XIX

IN October 1916 Sablin quite unexpectedly was appointed to command the Nth army corps. General Pestretzoff, writing to him about the promotion, had added: "We have faith in you, and are sure that you will communicate your bold cavalry dash to these new troops and will do wonders with them. Keep your eye on the officer's staff, however. There was a case in the 819th Zakholoostny infantry regiment, when the soldiers re-

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fused to go to the position on the instigation of ensigns. However, the 812th Morotchnensk regiment is under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Kozloff, the hero of Novo-Georgieffsk who at the review showed me his regiment in perfect trim.

"Drop in to dinner any day, if possible on a Sunday, when the band plays and a concert or theatricals are usually organized in the evening. I expect you. God bless you. Pestretzoff." Sablin had not seen Pestretzoff for ten months and found him looking much older than he had expected, his former manly demeanour having giving place to bloated stoutness. His round, clean-shaven face showed any amount of wrinkles and bore a cunning and sly expression. After a talk with him Sablin was in a very depressed mood as he left the army headquarters on his way to his corps. What met his eyes on the way was by no means encouraging. The village streets were muddy and soldiers crowded the whole length of them. Their overcoats were old, shabby and dirty, either too wide or too tightfitting. They wore imitation-fur caps untidily kept and old shoes instead of the usual high shaft-boots, now very scarce. They looked with amazement at Sablin's car, abstained from saluting and if some of them deigned to, it was done in a most off-hand way. These men belonged to his corps. It struck Sablin that they were either very young—from twenty to twenty-three, or much older than thirty. Evidently the medium-aged contingent had already fallen; the efficient troops existed no more and only raw material, that required training, was left and such men as had served in the transport section owing to slight wounds or who had simply bolted from the battle-field. During the thirty-eight hours that Sablin was on his way, he never once, while crossing villages crammed with soldiers, noticed the slightest sign of drill or other similar training. He always saw the same picture: groups of soldiers dawdling near the village houses and crackling sunflower seeds or sitting on earth-mounds or benches looking glum.

At Zastavtze, the headquarters of the 205th division under command of that General who had spent thirty years of his life in a war-office section, and hardly knew the difference be-

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

tween a regiment and a division, Sablin inspected the regiments in reserve and spoke with the Commanders. The regiments did not impress him as being real troops. There they stood in huge grey masses on the black field, without a band or banners. The closer he saw them, the more he noticed those signs, which, to an experienced eye, form a criterion of the fighting capacities and discipline of the men. Untidy equipment, irregularly worn caps, absence of drill, and indifferent, blunt faces were the features that struck him. A soldier of the first company, while presenting arms, held the barrel of his rifle the wrong way. Sablin made a sign to the commanding officer, a youth with a round face and small eyes, who, failing to understand what was required of him, fussed about, at a loss what to do. Finally the Colonel of the regiment came to the rescue. Similar incidents occurred in the other companies. The men seemed ignorant even of the manual of arms.

The singers and the officers of the 819th regiment appeared after dinner. Sablin came out to greet them on the front steps. The weather was clearing. A red streak of sunset glowed above the dense dark forest. The singers, mostly young fellows, had assembled in the court-yard. Several ensigns sang in the chorus, three of whom attracted Sablin's attention. One of these was a handsome, clean-shaven youth, with a well-shaped nose and fierce-looking black eyes. His sensual mouth showed strong white teeth, and a strong will, energy and audacity were bespoken by his movements. A lock of thick black hair protruded on his forehead from under his fur-cap. Though good-looking, the expression of his face was somewhat repulsive: his mouth was too sensual, his features were coarse and he made the impression of a cruel animal. Sablin asked the regimental Commander about that ensign.

"That's Osetroff. His father owns a cab stand, and, according to rumours, is suspected of manslaughter besides horse-stealing. He's a smart-looking chap, isn't he, and handsome. I should have promoted him to the rank of adjutant, if he hadn't been so stubborn and uneducated. He's a wonderful shot and an excellent horseman."

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The second ensign, who had turned up with a large accordion, was a youth with a round face, prominent cheek-bones and narrow Mongolian eyes. He smiled with a dull, meaningless expression.

"And who's the accordion-player?" asked Sablin.

"That's Gaiduk, a Lett. He's out of the commercial school and has since taken a fancy to the military career. He's a devil for drinking and very muscular."

The third ensign was standing by their side with passionate musing eyes. His thin, pale face with large blue eyes wore an expression full of melancholy. His slim taper fingers, were adorned with rings, and a golden bracelet encircled his wrist. He was smartly dressed and his movements were effeminate and cat-like.

"That fair-haired youth over there, who looks like a girl, is Schlossberg, the son of a Petrograd lawyer," said the regimental Commander. "In my opinion he's not quite normal. But his voice and musical talent are quite marvelous. He has studied singing and has often appeared on the stage. Those three are quite inseparable and we call them the three Musketeers. Schlossberg is an infant surrounded by devils. While his pals are devil-may-care scapegraces and are worshipped by the soldiers, he goes in for poetry, weeps over the slain and probably takes dope."

"A nice lot," said Sablin examining them, "if it weren't for their cockades and shoulder-flaps I'd never have taken them for officers."

"No more they are," said Pastoukhoff. "And would you believe it, the majority of the present officers are in the same style."

"Revolutionary officers," said the General-staff Colonel, regretting at the same moment that the words had escaped him, for Sablin gazed at him sharply.

Neither the corporal nor the sergeant-major had accompanied the singers. Despite the presence of their superiors and of the army corps Commander, they chatted and laughed and gave the impression of a crowd of undisciplined village-clowns, rather

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than of soldiers. Many of their overcoats lacked shoulder-flaps, as though they did not care a straw for the distinction.

Osetroff placed the soldiers according to their voices and stood up in front of them. Gaiduk with his accordion seated himself by their side on a big wooden block, while Schlossberg stood aside. Osetroff glanced at his chorus and began singing the first lines of a popular Russian song dealing with the exploits of Stenka Razin, a robber-chieftain. The chorus seconded him.

Sablin had often heard that song, which had become current in the regiments, but never had he heard it performed so coarsely. The chorus lacked harmony. The singers yelled more than they sang, and the voices were very deficient. Yet they seemed carried away by the wild significance of the words.

Sablin was disgusted and addressing the officers in a dry tone, requested them to follow him into the house. "Ensigns Osetroff, Gaiduk and Schlossberg please come this way," he said.

The singers kept silent. Sablin's tone of voice gave everyone to understand that the Commander of the army corps was displeased.

"Gentlemen," Sablin began and his voice rang with indignation. "I absolutely forbid such songs to be sung."

"What are they to sing in that case," muttered the General-staff Colonel with surprise.

"Don't pretend you don't know: 'The battle of Pultava,' 'Borodina' and all those other patriotic songs that you used to sing in the cadet-corps and in your military school! You'll be kind enough to do away with all this filthy trash, which can only have a depraving influence on the soldiers. As for you, Your Excellency, kindly attend to the selections of your singers and see that the songs sung are of a patriotic and elevated nature. Heaven knows what trash they've invented."

Sablin turned on his heel and left the room. As soon as the car had disappeared from sight, the Colonel of the regiment, to which the singers belonged, exclaimed aloud:

"What a fighting-cock. A regular reactionary General. I forbid this and I forbid that!"

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Meanwhile Sablin was riding along an endless road through a dense forest. He felt sick at heart.

The chief of the army corps staff, Davydoff, a short red-haired bandy-legged man, stopped the car-driver and informed Sablin that they could advance no further.

All around made it evident that they had neared that fatal zone where peaceful and unconcerned life gave place to the kingdom of death. The spot they had left but half an hour before was full of life and activity. Here all seemed dead. A village close by was deserted. A road, that had not been used for a long time extended westward beyond the village. Wind and rain had levelled its ruts and it was overgrown with high grass. Uncultivated and ungleaned fields, mounds of black earth and black funnels half filled with water stretched on both sides with, here and there, a small mound of earth and a cross made of two sticks, without any inscription.

"Traces of the August and September battles," said Davydoff. "It was pure madness to have begun the attack at that time. When we came up to this place a month later dead bodies were still lying scattered about. We buried them as best we could. This is a regular swamp, you know. It's quite impossible to dig trenches, owing to the damp. Just notice the number of funnels close by the road. Instinctively the men concentrated near the road and the enemy peppered them with heavy artillery."

The road led to a bridge thrown across a wide ditch, whence it gently ascended to sandy mounds.

Amid the sand, here and there overgrown with dry bushes, a post, with a board attached to it bearing a large inscription "Section of the 812th regiment," was perceptible. Close by, a ditch, gradually deepening into the sand, formed the passage to the trenches. Sablin and Davydoff entered it in the nick of time, for at that very moment a shell whistled past and exploded close by, and bullets whizzed above, ahead and to the rear.

"They've noticed us," said Davydoff. "A most unpleasant sensation to realise that, while you are crossing a deserted spot, someone is spying on you and following your movements. This passage is seen by them from the balloon."

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

A captive, sausage-shaped, grey balloon hung in the air far away on the horizon. Sablin and Davydoff gradually disappeared under ground and were soon in a ditch far deeper than they were tall. They could see nothing but the dull grey autumnal sky above their heads. The ditch with its sandy banks shifted into a willow tress, and a smell of damp earth and human residue became noticeable.

They had already crossed half a mile of the passage which, from a straight line, often deviated to right and left, and finally ended in a transverse passage. Planks were nailed to the walls with printed inscriptions showing the way to "Fort Morthomme" and to "Fort Verdun."

"Which way do you wish to go? The 13th company is quartered in the 'Fort Morthomme.' You can see the Germans with your naked eye. Thence we can cross the river to our 'Place d'Armes.' It's a miserable place and yet occupies a whole brigade."

Sablin turned to the right. The passage branched off at smaller intervals. At one of these cross-passages a tall figure, clad in a soldier's overcoat, appeared. A slim Lieutenant-Colonel, with a narrow clean-shaven face, approached Sablin and saluted him. He was followed by a soldier with a rifle. The Lieutenant-Colonel was Kozloff, the Commander of the regiment.

He made his report to Sablin and said in a firm and polite tone:

"Your Excellency, I daren't let you go to the front line and must request you to wait until the gas-masks are brought. Jelieskin," said he addressing the soldier, "run to the military depot and bring two gas-masks."

Sablin blushed without saying a word and looked at Davydoff reproachfully.

"You are right, Colonel," he said, "I shall wait. Have you a sufficient supply?"

"Twenty per cent according to instructions. Our soldier is careless and neglectful. Until he has experienced it personally,

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he can't be made to understand that the gas-mask is just as important and indispensable as a spade or a rifle."

"Have you been long on active service?"

"I finished my military education in 1906."

"Where have you served?"

"In the Zaraisk regiment,"

"It's there also that you earned the St. George's cross?"

"Yes, Your Excellency. I was decorated for storming the fortified position at Novy-Kortchin."

"I have already heard of that exploit. It was very neatly done."

"The soldiers were different then, Your Excellency."

Jelieskin brought the gas-masks. They went forward. Through an embrasure Sablin could see the whole position. Thirty paces off eight rows of barbed wire were fixed to thick posts and a second similar fencing was established another sixty paces off. Nothing but sand, dug up by projectiles and covered here and there with dry grass, extended in front of our forts. Beyond the river the bank, on which several huts were erected, rose abruptly. Some distance beyond the village a two-story white manor showed amid the dark leafless trees of the park. Not a soul was to be seen on the other bank. It was hardly credible that a whole German infantry regiment was concentrated there.

"Who is at the head of this company," Sablin inquired.

"Captain Wertzinsky," Kozloff replied. It seemed to Sablin that he had heard the name before.

"What sort of a man is he?"

"He's mad, Your Excellency."

"How then is he allowed to serve?"

"For certain reasons I need him. When the Nth army corps took these forts from the Austrians a tragedy, unusual even in warfare, happened in this very fort. Two corpses were found in the elegantly furnished section of the company Commander. A young Hungarian officer and a young woman were found lying side by side on a bed evidently taken from the manor. To all appearance the officer had shot the woman and had then com-

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mitted suicide. Blood and the brains of their shattered skulls had besmeared the wooden lining of the walls. In wartime you get used to the sight of corpses. How often does it happen that you lie for days among dead bodies. But somehow these bodies made a deep impression and a legend was spread abroad that, at night, moaning sounds came from that trench, that sounds were heard as though someone were endeavouring to scrape the blood from the walls, but it reappeared again in yet brighter patches; that her portrait had been unhooked from the wall, and yet there it was again hanging in its place, and that someone walked in the trench at night. In fact the spot was said to be haunted. No one would agree to live in it, despite its luxury. What with the enemy to face and ghosts in the trenches, the company Commander lost all faith in the possibility of defending the stronghold. This was the moment when Wertzinsky proved to be of use. He does not believe either in God or the devil and lay down on that very bed, wrapped in the blood-stained blanket. Nothing happened and the soldiers regained confidence. He's a knight of St. George, though, some say, by mistake. The breaking through of the position at Kostioukhnovka was done by his company and he was rewarded on that occasion. Sub-lieutenant Ermoloff, a splendid youth, is the actual Commander of his company."

"This Wertzinsky must be an interesting individual."

"By the bye here is his hole."

Four steps led to an open space facing the enemy. Four large beams supported a heavy ceiling covered with planks and six feet of earth. A door and two windows showed into the recess. The red light of a candle flickered through the windows. Sablin opened the door and a scene unusual in war-time met his eyes.

The room looked more like a cell. Hardly four yards high, it was about the same in width and length. The greater part of it was taken up by the bed, which stood in a recess and was untidily covered by a crumpled, motley and tattered blanket.

In front of the door stood a table with two ample arm-chairs at its sides. A middle-sized man in a crumpled, soldier's over-

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coat, which hung on him like a dressing-gown, slowly rose from his seat as they came in. His face lighted from beneath by the rays of the candle was sickly lean, covered with wrinkles and with a stubble-beard. His pale eyes reminded Sablin of Rasputin's eyes, but lacked their sharp look, for his eyelids blinked and he seemed at a loss what to do.

"Captain Wertzinsky," Kosloff said addressing him, "give your report. The new army corps Commander has come to visit us."

The figure staggered and moved slowly towards Sablin into the dim light of the open door. But, instead of reporting, Captain Wertzinsky muttered:

"Kazimir Kazimirovitch Wertzinsky," and stretched out his large limp hand.

Sablin shook it involuntarily and looked intently into Wertzinsky's sharp features. The grey hair, which hung in thin tufts down his shrivelled scull, and the dull and rancorous pale eyes seemed familiar to him.

"Haven't we met before?" asked Sablin.

"Certainly," answered Wertzinsky with a malicious smile, "about twenty years ago at the Martoffs. Don't you remember the flaxen-haired schoolboy who attacked you for your excess of militarism. You took no notice of me at that time and did not even trouble to inquire for my name. Your interest then was quite evident to me. I, on the contrary, studied you as belonging to a different world."

This individual had straight away placed himself on such a footing that all the exigencies of rank-etiquette disappeared and simply two men, tied by a mutual secret, stood face to face.

"The present war has probably cured you of your anti-military delusions," said Sablin, preparing to leave the room so as to put an end to the conversation.

"On the contrary. Every day I get more and more convinced of the equity of our opinions and of your delusions. It's exactly the war that has given the last finishing touch to our teaching."

"We'll discuss the subject some other day," said Sablin, hastening towards the door.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"With the greatest pleasure. Please, visit me some evening. It's quiet here as in a grave. From time to time shells fly overhead, for the enemy has spotted us. It's as though a train rumbled above you and you ask yourself where it is likely to explode, which of the Russian idiots will be smashed to atoms for the sake of his faith, his Tsar and his mother-country. Come, please come."

He did not consider it his duty to accompany Sablin on his inspection of the fort. He was replaced by a sympathetic, gay-looking youth with a pink clean-shaven face, who reported in a firm voice: "Your Excellency, the fort of Morthomme is occupied by two officers and one hundred twelve soldiers of the 13th company of the 812th Morotchensk infantry regiment. Nothing special has been noticed on the enemy's side." Sablin shook his hand and the young officer bowed and introduced himself as Sub-lieutenant Ermoloff.

"What line of Ermoloffs do you belong to?" asked Sablin.

"My father is a landowner of the Stavropol Government."

"Have you been long at the front?"

"For the last three months."

He had already awakened the company and the men were standing in readiness, looking attentively at Sablin as though they understood the importance of the situation.

"Let's go on," he said to Kozloff. "I hope to see you soon again, my dear lieutenant, God bless you!"

"A very fine officer," said Kozloff. "The whole company depends on him."

"Then why do you need that madman?"

"It can't be helped. Ermoloff is too young. He's not got sufficient authority. At times, when the company wavers, he'll run into Wertzinsky's room, sit with him in silence for half an hour and come out again, saying: 'There's nothing to be done: the company Commander has given the order. He's in a state of wrath.' And the company quiets down. They can't make Wertzinsky out. He appears to them uncanny and inexplicable and they are afraid of him. The worst of it is that nowadays one can't do without policy. The soldiers are quite different to

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what they were and the officers are new and inexperienced. Here's the 14th company."

A thin black-bearded Captain came towards Sablin with his report.

Sablin felt attracted by Wertzinsky's awe-inspiring fort, full of blood-curdling reminiscences and ghosts, and that feeling overcame him mostly in the night. He fell into the craze of driving alone to the position at night-time, without Davydoff or his adjutant.

XX

THESE nocturnal alerts, the risk incurred from the enemy's shells, diverted Sablin. He felt that by dividing that risk with his soldiers he acquitted himself towards Karpoff and towards his own conscience. In so doing he justified in his own eyes his right of wearing a General's epaulets, of giving orders and of dictating his will to the men. Kozloff, the black-bearded Captain, Ermoloff and their soldiers had not got accustomed to Sablin and called him "our General." In their minds he had risen high above all the other Generals; they loved him and had faith in him. In the staff, however, he was found fault with. Davydoff and the Commanders of the divisions considered that he made himself a living rebuke to themselves. They felt no inclination to risk their lives in such nocturnal adventures nor did they care to part with their comfortable night-quarters. The result was that they taxed Sablin with the desire of making himself popular and of aspiring to fame.

The same solitary candle burned in the dug-out as in the daytime. Wertzinsky was seated in one of the deep arm-chairs, his pale eyes fixed on the bed and on the dark spots on the wall above which hung the large portrait of a handsome dark-haired woman in evening-dress. He was clad in the same old overcoat and by his side on the table stood an iron mug. He looked at Sablin without the slightest expression of surprise, rose from his seat and, instead of delivering his report, simply said:

"Will you have tea?"

Sablin rejected the offer and, without uttering a word, took a

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

seat in the other arm-chair facing the door. He had only just taken leave of the regimental Commander and of the sub-lieutenant on the plea of wishing to judge for himself how far Wertzinsky's frame of mind was normal.

They both kept silent for a while. The light of the flame, which had flickered as the entrance-door opened, became motionless again and burned with an even, yellow-red glare. Sablin's eyes, accustomed to the dusk, noticed the dark blood-stains on the grey-silk counterpane and on the wall to the left of the portrait, which attracted his attention. It represented an elegantly-dressed Hungarian woman with bare shoulders and plump arms adorned with bracelets.

"Who was she, do you think?" inquired Wertzinsky as he caught Sablin's gaze. "A betrothed come to visit her bridegroom at the moment of the assault? his wife? his mistress or simply an adventuress on a visit to her lover?"

Sablin gave no answer.

"In any case," Wertzinsky continued, "she chose a very unpropitious moment. Our troops had broken through the front about ten miles to the left. The Hungarians knew nothing about it. The Zabaikal Cossacks attacked the breach, whereupon a panic arose. The Hungarians surrendered. He may have feared that the cossacks would torture him. Maybe he did not wish it to be known that she had come to see him."

"I understand his action," said Sablin.

"I quite believe you," said Wertzinsky with a cynical grin, which made Sablin shudder.

"What do you mean by saying that?" he inquired.

"On that question," the other answered, "I have always sided with you. You acted according to your right."

"What question are you hinting at?" asked Sablin.

"I am speaking of Marousia Lubovina," Wertzinsky answered coolly.

"What do you know about her," Sablin muttered in a seemingly off-hand tone.

"I am lucky in knowing all about love-adventures, maybe because I have no capacity myself in that line," Wertzinsky re-

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plied. "I know Korjikoff and all about it. I was likewise witness of Lieutenant Karpoff's drama. The silly boy fell in love at the hospital with the Grand Duchess Tatiana Nicholaievna and perished with her name on his lips. He fell, whereas I wear the St. George's cross which does not suit me and to which I really have no right. Such is life. Then again look at my Commander Kozloff, a most ideal man. He's doing his best to get on in his service, he's madly in love with his wife and I have every reason to believe that she is unfaithful to him and is betraying him with some sort of a blackguard. In love-affairs, mind you, the one who loves deeply is usually punished. It's a mistake to give way too seriously to that feeling. You, however, are not to blame, I once more repeat. You did not love. You gathered the fruit of enjoyment and you were right in so doing. In her case there lay a mistake of tactics and Lubovina was doomed to perish in any case. Had she not died she would have had to be done away with."

Wertzinski burst out laughing and his wrinkled face became distorted. His bad teeth showed through his open mouth.

His laughter filled Sablin with awe.

"Why do I go on sitting with this madman?" he asked himself. And yet that lunatic knew the secret that Marousia had taken with her to the grave and which he, Sablin, longed to know.

"Do you know what a faction is?" Wertzinsky exclaimed quite unexpectedly. "I don't belong to any faction: I consider myself above all that sort of thing; I am a Diogenes in the rank of a Captain. What do you say to that? 'His Honour Diogenes!' that sounds fine, doesn't it? You've probably heard something about the free-masons? All of you have a slight notion of them and you all fear them because of the mystery which surrounds their doings. In olden times the altar in the temple was screened by a curtain. The priests prayed and fell to their knees; crowds of believers flocked around and worshipped the invisible God because of the curtain that screened their idol. One night a daring individual, having drugged the sentinel, pulled back the curtain and, behold, there was nothing

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

behind it, but dust, rubbish and cobwebs. And that was worshipped by the congregation! Humanity has since lived through twenty centuries and is none the wiser. The iron mask! How exciting! Free-masons! The Sionist protocols, Ahaspher, Lucifer, Bathomet, Adoniram! and what not! Huysmans, the Black Mass, the knights of Cadosh, the mysteries of initiation, the universal conspiracy, symbols, mysterious signs, and so on! Everyone is excited and anxious to get at the bottom of all these mysteries. And were they to succeed they would find nothing but dust, rubbish and cobwebs. Everyone knows the disillusion that awaits him, but is afraid of owning it."

It seemed to Sablin as though Wertzinsky had lost the thread of his conversation, and he recalled it to his mind.

"What has all that to do with Marousia Lubovina?"

"Hm! Yes. From the mathematical point of view it stands in the same proportion as does an infinitely large quantity to an infinitely small one. But it is indispensable to treat the large quantity so as to evaluate the small one."

The sound as of a railway train was just then audible. Wertzinsky turned pale. Fear could be read in his pale eyes as he tried, with open mouth and trembling limbs, to ascertain where the shell was likely to fall. The projectile exploded somewhere to the left, far off, and the metallic sound of its scattered fragments filled the air during several seconds.

"Oh! I hate those sounds," said Wertzinsky; and threatening the portrait with his finger he added: "It's all her doing."

"Now listen to me," said Sablin. "Either you know something of Marousia Lubovina which I am ignorant of, and in that case I insist on your imparting it to me, or else you know nothing. In the latter case I can go, for I have nothing to do here."

"It's gruesome here, eh? Now admit that it's uncanny and that yet you feel drawn to the place, what with the shells and all that's taken place in this dug-out! Mysticism! You are all of you mystics. Rasputin too has an attractive influence."

"What has Rasputin to do with it?"

"There you likewise hit upon an altar behind a curtain, which

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once drawn aside brings you delusion, vacancy, dust and stench, and nothing more."

"Well, go to the devil with your Rasputin and let me hear your tale."

"Gently, my friend! You'd better not mention the devil. This is not the place for it. Well listen. I'll begin with the larger quantity: The world is governed by seventy wise men, and the curious part of it is, that no one knows who they are. Woodrow Wilson, Poincaré, Lloyd George, Buchanan! No—those are but puppets in their hands. No one knows those seventy wise men and no one knows where they are. What do you say to that? Seventy Sionist mages!"

"Who are they? Jews?"

"As I said before: no one knows. And there they are, ruling the world and universal politics. This war was the work of their hands. They needed it."

"Come now, Kazimir Kazimirovitch, I must request you to drop all these yarns and to tell me straight away, why Marousia Lubovina perished," said Sablin.

"As if you didn't know! So there—you see that war is an insanity and yet you've been carrying it on for nearly three years with idiotic stubbornness: by the will of seventy wise men unknown to anyone. Now those wise men are hidden by a curtain and, maybe, if the curtain were drawn aside the wise men would turn out to be blackguards, speculators, thieves, bankers and scoundrels. . . . Ha! ha! ha!"

"Couldn't you hurry on with your tale?"

"Very well! It will be easier for me to go on. Now comes the faction and their members tied by faction discipline. A faction in opposition to the present state of things. Mind you, Korjikoff, Marousia Lubovina's friend belonged to a faction and that faction aimed at dissolving the army. Do you remember our anti-militarism? It had been decided to get you to enlist in the faction and Marousia Lubovina had received the mission to recruit you. Isn't that sufficiently clear?"

Sablin kept silent. How simple it all seemed and what a fool he had been, at the time.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"However, you happened to be too strong. Love got the upperhand: Marousia Lubovina forgot all about her mission, the party discipline and the proposed plan, and only thought of you. If she had not died in childbirth, she would have been put to death. The faction is merciless with regard to renegades."

"And how about Rasputin?" asked Sablin wearily.

"That's a subject which will take a long time to deal with. There's a lot of mysticism about him. Well, I'll fulfil your wish. There's time enough until the day breaks. As it is I can't sleep at night, owing to my nerves."

"The whole civilized world is cemented together by the Christian faith," Wertzinsky began. "Faith, hope and charity. As long as charity existed among mankind the seventy wise men could take no hold over them. Ergo; the first motion was to replace charity by hatred, destroying faith for that purpose.

"That's where Rasputin comes in. And had he not existed, he would have been created. What is Christianity? Rasputin. What is the Tsar? Rasputin. What is the Russian nation? Rasputin. What do you say to this? And how about the seventy wise men and the curtain? You are not capable of manslaughter. Now tell me, warrior, hero, knight of the Cross of St. George—would you be capable of manslaughter? The amount of suffering, remorse and hysterical emotions anyone of you would have gone through, had you felled a foe or shot him with your revolver in the heat of the fray! Manslaughter is horrible. The likes of us would be capable of manslaughter but we would have no reason for killing Rasputin because we need him. We have risen to murder. You, fond as you are of butcher's meat, are capable of passing close by their shops and of calmly looking at the flesh exhibited. One step further and you would be as capable of calmly committing manslaughter. Place yourself close to your victim, stretch your arm and pull the trigger and there you are. A corpse. The corpse is clothed, maybe there's money in the pockets. Then again can't the corpse be utilized? Can't human flesh be tasted? Eh? You seem to wince at the thought? You wouldn't care to try? Well, then you could throw it to wild beasts or to dogs for food.

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Then again its skin, bones and hair could be used for some purpose or other."

"Drop it, Kazimir Kazimirovitch," Sablin objected.

"It makes you feel sick? Then how can you think of killing Rasputin? Once you've made up your mind, you must bear the consequences and must do away with five pounds of flesh. We would be capable of it. Have you read about that engineer who killed a man in the Leshtoukoff street with the purpose of robbing him and then cut up the body and forwarded it right and left in pound parcels? That man raised himself."

"He must have been a lunatic," said Sablin.

"He may be a lunatic in your eyes; we, however, consider him a strong-willed individual. Then again I remember last year, when I was getting over my wound, I saw in one of the Petrograd shops charming purses ticketed as 'made of human skin.' I doubt that they really were, for the police would probably have interfered. All the same the purses were soon sold out. And what do you say to the hangman's rope in connection with gamblers' luck? And the thief's candle made of human fat? Don't you feel that we are sliding down something very uncanny? A certain rich nobleman had fallen in love with a dancer, and when she died prematurely he put her in a coffin all covered with flowers and had her placed in the hall of his house, not allowing her to be carried to the grave. And there she remained. . . . Then again do you recollect the scene of the idiot and of Rogoshin by the side of the corpse? Eh? Ha, ha, ha!"

"But that's sheer sadism!"

"My dear friend, and what if the young generation were brought up to sadism! Eh? It would breed bold men. We'd become the equals of God, the red banner of the revolution and the inciting strains of the Marseillaise! But listen! God exists no more, the Gospel is no more read. Only a few of the old generation know it, and those are made a laughing stock. Man-slaughter is no crime any longer. Love is a bestial function without preliminaries. Property is a theft. Everything is allowed. Eh? What freedom!"

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"You're talking rot!"

"I? No, Your Excellency, there you are wrong. It's you, the intelligentsia, who talk rubbish. Then what can you expect of the mob? Fame, honor—that's rubbish. Down with the St. George's crosses. I have lain in hospital. The dear soldiers and sailors were looked upon as idols by elegant ladies. The noble deeds, the heroism of the soldiers! The officers were looked down upon and the Generals were ignored. The soldier is the hero of the war. The lower class are the heroes of the world. History is useless, science can go to the dogs, knowledge of reading and writing is quite unnecessary. Academicians and Professors are busy simplifying the Russian alphabet. Today you are: 'Your Excellency.' One step further and I'll call you 'General,' and the next time—Alexander Nicolaievitch,' and finish by addressing you as 'tovaristch.' The next step would end in my throttling you. Today I'd refuse to salute you and tomorrow, maybe, I'd thrash you in a dark alley. It's all so simple."

"You are forgetting yourself, my friend," said Sablin rising to his feet. Wertzinsky likewise got up and blew out the candle. A dim light fell through the narrow windows, the day having begun to dawn.

"What would be the result," said Sablin. "A herd of brutes? The return of the stone age?"

"Yes," Wertzinsky answered harshly, emphasizing each word, "yes a herd of brutes. A herd easily manageable for the seventy wise men, and their future slaves. They will kiss their feet and howl with delight on receiving the slightest alms from their masters. They will imagine that they are free because they will feel neither restraint nor elevation. They will be free of hope, faith, charity, honor, honesty, fame, and property. They will ignore their past and will not think of the future. They will live but from day to day.

"They'll perish."

"Probably. But there will be a new world quite different to the old one."

Sablin went to the door.

TO RED FLAG

"All that you have said to me is absolute insanity."

"No, absolute truth. Let us go. The day is breaking and I can show you more truth in all its crudeness. Our Commander has a wife, Zoïa, whom he calls Zorka. He's not received an answer from her to a single one of his letters for the last month. I have been informed that she is surrounded by individuals of the new formation and is on the verge of an abyss, if not perchance at the bottom of it. And he, poor devil, keeps praying for her. Every morning at day-break, before retiring into his dug-out to seek shelter against the aeroplanes, he leaves the trench, stands on the parapet and gazes at the rising sun. He prays God for a letter from her and beseeches Him to protect her. Hah, hah, hah!"

Sablin didn't listen to Wertzinsky any longer. He left the dug-out and went along the trench which was deserted. The sky was clear and frosty, aeroplanes were likely to make their appearance, and the men had taken shelter in the dug-outs. Wertzinsky followed Sablin.

"Don't see me off," said Sablin. He felt an aversion for Wertzinsky.

"I'm not seeing you off. I'm going on my own private business," the other answered.

"What a brute," Sablin said to himself, shrugging his shoulders.

"Now, just have a look, see whether I was not right!" whispered Wertzinsky, with a grin, as he pointed to the left.

Sablin involuntarily looked in that direction and saw a lonely slim figure standing motionless on the verge of the hill. It stood so near that Sablin distinctly saw its thin pale face, turned towards the east with an expression of love-sick suffering. It seemed to Sablin as though he heard the figure whisper: "Zorka, my Zorka! Where are you?"

"What do you say to that, eh?"

"Love," Sablin said to himself, looking admiringly at Kozloff, whereupon he quickened his pace as though anxious to rid himself of Wertzinsky and his ironical grin.

"Love," said Sablin, nearly aloud, and his heart beat faster.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

XXI

AFTER the war had been declared Zoïa Nicholaievna Kosloff left the town where her husband's regiment had been quartered and went to Petersburg. Her father and mother were dead, and she had no ties in that town except the faded reminiscences of her school-life and the hope of coming across one or an other of her school friends. A couple of months before the war her aunt had died, leaving her a small legacy in that town consisting of furniture for five rooms and five thousand roubles in cash. For the Kozloffs, who were restricted to the husband's humble pay, that had meant a fortune, and Zoïa Nicholaievna had instantly proceeded to prepare their town lodging. She had hoped, when the war was over—and she was sure that it would not last—to persuade her husband to join the Pay-master General's Office or some other military office of the capital and to lead a life of enjoyment, the more so as her little daughter Valia's future education depended on their living in the capital.

She succeeding in hiring a five-room flat on the Poushkin-skaja and was busy during the first months of the war fitting up her new lodging. She engaged a maid-servant, Tania, a pretty, frivolous girl, who soon became her mistress' confidential friend. She often received tender letters from her husband and wrote to him daily. Her day was amply taken up by her little daughter Valia and by shopping and dress-makers, and in the evening she would either go alone to the theater, or to cinemas in company of her faithful Tania. She grew passionately fond of cinemas and followed every new film.

And yet continual solitude became a burden to her. So as not to feel too dull she had, at her husband's advice, fixed certain hours of the day for various occupations, such as music and singing, drawing and reading, and took Valia out for a walk. But she felt lonely. It seemed to her as though she were growing old, as though her youth were gone and life were dull. She found that she had had no joy so far. She would sit before her looking-glass and scrutinize her face minutely, afraid of noticing wrinkles, or grey threads in her hair. The glass re-

TO RED FLAG

flected the young face of a woman, in the full bloom of her twenty-seven years, who was beginning to grow stout with inactivity. Her light-chestnut hair fell in natural curls on her pure white forehead, on her shoulders and would have covered her back in wide glossy waves had it been let. Her dark eyebrows overarched large, grey, eyes and her nose, though pretty, was somewhat quaintly shaped. Her pouting lips, slightly drooping at the corners, gave her a charmingly capricious and yet bashful expression, while her white teeth were so even, that they might have been mistaken for artificial ones. After a severe criticism of her appearance Zoïa Nicholaievna decided that, though not a regular beauty, she was certainly pretty. She was very feminine and had feminine tastes. She was fond of sweets, of sentimental, heart-rending novels, of melodramas and of dancing.

Her image in the mirror led her thoughts to her husband. Alexander Ivanovitch was twelve years the senior of his wife. He married her when she was twenty-three and afraid of remaining an old maid. Did she love him? It had been a love-marriage, but when she came, in her present solitude, to analyze her feelings, she arrived at the conclusion that she had an unlimited respect for her husband, was slightly afraid of him and only after these predominant feelings came love. He was physically strong, and his embraces always left her tired and bruised. His passion caused her a certain dread, and she felt small and insignificant in his presence and, had it not been for his absolute devotion to her and for his readiness to fulfil her slightest desire, she would have feared him. In his present correspondence he gave her fatherly advice, which made her respect him rather than love him passionately.

She was fond of her little Valia but could not make up her mind to devote her whole time to her as long as the child could not talk or understand her. And yet she had been a good mother, had fed her with her own breast and played with her as often as she could. Her husband had proved to be a hero as she had expected. He had been rewarded with the St. George's cross, had received a bayonet-thrust in the chest and had re-

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

mained at the front. He had written nothing about it personally, but his regimental-chums had sent her enthusiastic letters, explaining how he had been wounded while defending a soldier at his own peril. The feeling of pride which had filled her on receipt of the news was poisoned by spite at his always wishing to sacrifice himself for the sake of others and for that of his service, without at that moment giving a thought to herself or to Valia.

She was pleased at her husband's promotion and in 1916 she had the satisfaction of being the wife of a Lieutenant-Colonel and regimental Commander.

"I wonder what the regiment and the officers are like," she repeated to herself. "There must probably be a band, an adjutant and an officers' mess." And she pictured to herself how she would show herself arm-in-arm with Alexander Ivanovitch while the band played a march of greeting and the officers stood up and received her with military honours, and longed to be amid all those joyful and gay ensigns and lieutenants.

Petrograd was full of war-workers—especially women war-workers. Zoïa Nicholaievna alone did nothing. She had once made an attempt to offer her services as sister of charity in a neighbouring hospital. An angry-looking surgeon in a white gown had looked at her with gloomy, tired eyes, had scrutinized her expensive seal-skin jacket and had inquired whether she had studied to become a nurse. On hearing her reply in the negative the doctor had turned his back on her. Heart-rending groans and a very noxious smell came from the corridor. Hot tears streamed from her eyes as she hurried out of the hospital. Returning home she wept bitterly and decided without asking for leave, to start for the front, to her husband, to abandon her child and everything.

The next day Zoïa Nicholaievna, after having returned from her walk with her little girl, went out for a stroll on the Newsky Prospect. It was a fine August day, and the sun shone brightly.

"Zoïa, is that you?" suddenly exclaimed a good-looking girl in the garb of a nurse, with a very short skirt that barely covered her knees, and in high yellow lace-boots.

TO RED FLAG

"Don't you recognize me? I'm Nina Berg," she said.

The meeting resulted in Nina's going into Zoïa's flat for tea and a chat. "You'll tell me all about yourself."

Valia was shown to the recovered school friend.

"That's a future citizen," said Nina. "Mind, Zoïa, that you bring her up to understand real liberty and love of humanity."

Zoïa Nicholaievna told the story of her life. Nina listened to her as though she were a doctor listening to his patient's report on his ailing. At times she would interrupt her by questions which made Zoïa blush.

"Why should you care to know? You are a young girl," she ended by saying.

"Zoïa, I know that you won't judge me harshly and will understand me. I am no longer a virgin."

"You are married," Zoïa Nicholaievna exclaimed. "You've been deceiving me?"

"No. I've given the preference to free love. My first love was a student. Oh! How he loved me! Now it's an officer of the new formation: a former man of law."

"How could you? Without the sacrament of matrimony! First one and then the other! What a nightmare!"

Nina burst out laughing, jumped from her seat and, putting her hands on Zoïa's shoulders, kissed her on the mouth, on the eyes, on the nose. Then, stepping back two paces, she took a tragedian's pose, folded her arms on her breast, dropped her pretty face on her bosom and, looking at Zoïa Nicholaievna, began in a dramatic tone:

"You are free of sin, throw the first stone at me!" Then, noticing that Zoïa Nicholaievna was on the point of bursting into tears, she embraced her, and, taking her by the waist, led her into the sitting-room.

"Your place is most cosy. It's so quiet and nice and so out of the way here. May I visit you?"

"For goodness' sake, yes! I'd be so happy if you often came to see me. If you can, come every day. Have dinner with me here tomorrow or, better still, come to lunch and stay to dinner."

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"May he come too? He's not a bad fellow. He's now serving in the reserve battalion of the guards."

"Please invite him too," muttered Zoïa Nicholaievna confusedly.

"But for God's sake don't tell anyone, and don't write about it to your husband."

"I have no secrets from him."

"Then let this be a secret, to begin with at least. Do you promise?"

Zoïa Nicholaievna, thinking that Nina did not wish him to know that she, Nina, had a lover, consented.

"There now, what a dear you are!" Nina exclaimed. "Such a kind soul! I'll tell him to come at once, if you don't object. You'll see what a jolly time we'll have. Let me ring him up. You've got a telephone, haven't you?"

"No! What do I need a telephone for? Whom could I talk with, considering I don't know a soul in the town."

"How can you possibly live without a telephone? You'll have to have one fixed up. I want to draw you, my sweet butter-fly, into the very flames of the revolutionary struggle."

On the next day Nina arrived towards evening with an officer, a stout man with thin, slightly-curved red hair, clean-shaven like an actor and with oily impudent eyes. He wore a well-fitting tunic, knee-breeches and puttees which covered his fat calves up to the knee. He was shiny, and too affable, and did not take Zoïa Nicholaievna's fancy.

"There, Zoïa, I've brought 'tovaristch' Boris along with me. Let me introduce him to you—Sub-lieutenant Boris Matveievitch Knoop. You must call him simply 'tovaristch Boris.'"

"Why should she, straight away?" Knoop objected. "Let her first get used to us, like us, and understand us."

He bowed with deference and kissed her hand. Zoïa Nicholaievna could not help noticing that his hands were "soignés," with expensive rings and well-trimmed, polished nails. He smelt of scent. Zoïa Nicholaievna did not know what to say to him and felt perplexed, unaccustomed as she was to the society of men.

TO RED FLAG

Knoop at her request seated himself in an arm-chair and begged to be allowed to smoke.

"You are nervous, Boris," said Nina patting Knoop's hand. "You're smoking and that's a sign that you are nervous."

"No, wonder! I didn't expect to meet such a pretty lady. Besides it's so difficult to start when you are ignorant of the 'Credo' of the person you intend talking to."

"Her 'Credo?'" said Nina, with a laugh. "Kaiser, Kirche, Kinder, Kleider und Küche.* That's about all Zoïa knows. The boarding-school, her father—a Brigadier-General in some out of the way town, and her husband—a Colonel, a bold regimental Commander, knight of the St. George's cross, a slave of his Emperor, and a father to his soldiers."

Nina called on Zoïa every day, mostly accompanied by Knoop. They had dinner together, visited cinemas and theatres, had tea together in the evening and Knoop tried to develop Zoïa's mind by opening her eyes to those vast fields which lay in store in the free Socialistic-Democratic Russia of the future. According to his words the Kingdom of Heaven, the great truth and paradise on earth were to be the result of the future revolution. Zoïa listened to him entranced. There would be no more capital punishment, no prisons nor banishments, mankind would be happy, and no oppressed or disinherited fellow-creatures would exist any longer. When left to herself, however, she would analyze all the opinions and plans emitted by Knoop and Nina, and would discover, in the paradise to come, many a detail which did not speak to her heart. However the whole matter seemed dim and incomprehensible to her mind until, one evening, the visit to her lodging of a gay crowd consisting of Osetroff, Gaiduk, Schlossberg and a quaint-looking girl, who introduced herself in an off-hand way as "tovaristch Jenny," gave her more insight into their real meaning.

Osetroff, in his elegantly-cut tunic, wide Russian breeches and shaft boots, a lock of hair overhanging his forehead, and with the manners of a village peasant, instantly filled the small

* The Emperor, the Church, Children, Dresses and the Kitchen.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

sitting-room with his loud voice and laughter and deeply impressed Tania, who gazed at him with enthusiastic eyes. His face and manners bespoke his cock-suredness, as though they meant to say: "I can dare anything and, if needs be, I can pay." Gaiduk wore a modern tunic and riding breeches, lace-boots and puttees. His figure was square and angular. He hardly spoke and, after making Zoïa's acquaintance, concentrated his heavy gaze on her. His broad clean-shaven face was shiny and covered with pimples and warts, while a sensual smile, which discovered two rows of scarce and yellow teeth, played on his thick fleshy lips.

Schlossberg wore a starched high collar under his military tunic, long trousers and lace-boots. His beardless pale face, the dark rims under his eyes, which looked tired and dim, and his languid and lazy movements proved him to be of a sickly constitution. He stretched his thin and "soigné" hand to Zoïa with a condescending movement. His fair shiny hair was carefully parted and showed signs of premature baldness.

"Tovaristch" Jenny wore a man's shirt with a bright red scarf, held together by a pin in the shape of a skull, and a dark-blue jacket. A skirt of the same colour fell slightly below her knees, showing high yellow lace-boots. She would have been handsome with her fair hair and dreamy, enigmatic eyes, had her complexion not spoiled the general impression by its sickly, anemic pallor.

"Don't be surprised at our unceremonious behaviour," said Schlossberg gently, addressing Zoïa Nicholaievna. "The war's to blame for having made us so off-hand. We have got into the habit of reaping without having sown."

At times Zoïa Nicholaievna had the feeling of being in the midst of lunatics. They often came to see her, brought wine with them as well as vodka and zakouska, and towards midnight they'd assemble in her dining-room, drinking, and making a hell of a row. She was unable to protest and when she would complain to Nina, saying that her house was not a public-house and that she objected to their spending their money, her friend would reply:

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"My dear child, can't you understand that therein lies communism? All our strength and the happiness of future existence depend on the absolute absence of restraint. Haven't you noticed? Osetroff has fallen head and ears in love with you at first sight? You can consider yourself very lucky. He's handsome and well off. His father owns fifty cab-stands notwithstanding the war. Besides he's of such an impetuous nature that you can never tell what scrape he is likely to get into. Have you taken a fancy to him?"

"Yes, he's good-looking, but his eyes frighten me."

"You must give yourself to him. Don't forget that he is a prominent member of the faction, a leader of the coming movement, and such a good-looking fellow. You can consider yourself mighty lucky."

"Nina," Zoïa objected severely. "Please never talk to me on such a subject, do you understand? It's very wrong of you. It's disgusting, Nina"—she exclaimed in tears. "You must do all in your power to keep Osetroff from coming to see me any more."

Nina somehow succeeded in calming Zoïa. Once Zoïa had envied Nina's high lace-boots. On the following day, soon after lunch time, Osetroff turned up with a parcel. She at first wanted to have him shown out, but had not the courage. When she came into the sitting-room, he untied the parcel and took out a charming pair of boots.

"I've brought them for you, Zoïa Nicholaievna. Please, accept this little present at my hands."

"No, Michail Sergeievitch. Never in the world. How could I accept such a present!"

"Zoïa Nicholaievna! only just see whether they fit, whether I have succeeded in choosing the right size."

There he was, standing in front of her with the boots in his hands. His eyes were burning with passion, and beads of perspiration shone on his forehead at the roots of his hair. His wide chest heaved with emotion, and yet she noticed a trace of shyness in his gaze. His hands trembled. The shoes were charming and Zoïa seated herself helplessly in an arm-chair.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

He took her movement for a sign of consent and threw himself on his knees before her. With trembling hands he proceeded to unlace her boots and, having pulled them off, fitted on the new pair which reached nearly to the knees.

"Do they fit? Try to walk in them," he implored, rising to his feet. Zoïa Nicholaievna walked a few paces. The boots were a perfect fit, and simply moulded her small foot and leg. Zoïa was unable to hide that the boots pleased her.

"I'll take them off myself," she said, "and then for God's sake take them with you and leave me. You're quite crazy."

She seated herself in the arm-chair, and at that moment he rushed towards her and covered her feet and legs with passionate kisses. Zoïa Nicholaievna was staggered by such insolence and nearly fainted.

"You . . . you are a scoundrel. You're mad!" she exclaimed rising to her feet. "Go, go, at once."

"You charming little tiger! You must be mine. All I possess I lay at your feet and myself into the bargain! Be mine!" exclaimed Osetroff. He endeavoured to catch hold of her but she escaped him, rushed into her bed-room and closed the door.

"Zoïa," he cried, "let me in. You'll drive me wild!" She kept silent.

"Zoïa," he went on, "God knows what I am capable of committing in my frenzy. I don't care a hang. I'm a finished man and am ready to suffer death."

No answer.

He tried to break open the door. Tania made her appearance, answering Zoïa's bell from inside the bed-room.

"Be off, Michail Sergeievitch, stop this scandalous behaviour," she said with a laugh. "What on earth are you doing? The wife of a Colonel, and her husband at the front. She's a General's daughter. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Tania," Osetroff said imploringly. "You must understand me. I must possess her, I insist on it."

"Go away! have done with this scandal."

"I'll go off my head, Tania!"

TO RED FLAG

His wild and inflamed eyes fixed Tania's and evidently read something in their gaze, and a spark of understanding passed from one to the other. Tania turned pale of a sudden and breathed heavily.

"I'll cover you with riches, Tania!"

"You mustn't, Michail Sergeievitch," she said retreating to the door. Osetroff followed her slowly with clenched fists. His whole body quivered under the reminiscence of the kisses he had lavished on Zoïa's well-shaped feet and legs. He was hardly able to restrain himself.

Tania ran to her room, leaving her door open, and Osetroff followed her stealthily.

"I'll give you a fortune," he went on, hardly conscious of his words. Tania stood by the window with her back to the light, pale and breathing hard. Osetroff approached her, caught her by the waist and his lips met hers.

Seven days elapsed before Osetroff came to see Zoïa again. His friends gave her to understand that he had been on a spree and had visited places that they were ashamed to mention. Nina pressed Zoïa's hand and said disparagingly: "Whatever have you done, Zoïa! Osetroff has been for seven nights on the loose with fallen women. He has gone to the dogs!" On the eighth day he made his appearance as if nothing had happened. He kissed Zoïa's hand most respectfully. He was tidily shaved and scented. His face looked wan, his eyelids bore the traces of sleepless nights and his eyes looked dull.

"Ah!" said Gaiduk. "There you are! After a night passed with her you've yourself become effeminate."

"Stop it!" said Osetroff sternly. "Don't forget our agreement."

The evening was passed as usual. Political topics were broached, the necessity of a revolution was discussed, as well as the burden of the war. Nina recited and was made to dance. Zoïa became quite lively and looked upon the episode of the previous week as having been a nightmareish dream. She went to her room, arrayed her feet in the boots presented to her by Osetroff, and returned to the sitting-room.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"Nina," she said. "Let's dance the Hungarian dance."

She had a great talent for dancing. Her modest way and the classical steps she produced made a deeper impression than Jenny's wild execution of the sailor's jig.

Osetroff's eyes shone, his face grew flushed. During supper he drank any amount of vodka and cognac, and, when the meal was over, went into the sitting-room and proceeded to sing, in a voice full of passion, a few verses from "Stenka Razin" about the exploits of the robber and his rape of the Persian Princess.

"Those were jolly times, my friends," he exclaimed, "when one was able to seduce Princesses! And now? A General's daughter! Damn the Generals," he added with an obscene oath.

He stopped short, looking around with a wild gaze.

"It's all rot, damn you. To hell with everybody."

"There Misha! You were a communist and have now become a bourgeois," remarked Knoop reproachfully.

"You are in my way," muttered Osetroff.

"Let's go, 'tovaristchi,'" said Schlossberg. "He's gone off his head."

Nina laughed hysterically. Jenny, deadly pale, looked at Zoïa fixedly. Knoop seemed displeased with something. They all began fussing about, with trivial and insinuating smiles, and hurriedly proceeded to leave, with the exception of Osetroff, who remained alone in the sitting-room, his arms crossed, and with the same expression of scorn. Zoïa Nicholaievna followed her guests to the hall with a look of dismay. She was at a loss to understand what had happened. She noticed how Gaiduk whispered something to Tania as she helped him on with his overcoat, whereupon Tania disappeared, returning shortly in her mantle and shawl.

"So long, Zoïa. Be a good girl! Believe me it's best so!" said Nina as she gave her a parting kiss. "You must talk it out with him."

They departed accompanied by Tania, treacherously leaving Zoïa to the power of that awe-inspiring man. Zoïa decided to shut herself up in her room. He would surely not break open the door? Osetroff, however, seemed to have guessed her in-

TO RED FLAG

tention. He made a rush at her and clutched her rigid hands. She looked at him imploringly.

"Michail Sergeievitch," she whispered, "leave me. You mustn't!"

"Very well! I shan't," he said gently and bowing his head.

"That is not real love," Zoïa went on. "That violence and dastardliness!"

"You know very well that I recognize neither love nor dastardliness," said Osetroff fixing Zoïa's tearful eyes.

"Let me go," she whispered. "Please, be a good fellow and leave hold of me."

"Zoïa Nicholaievna! I've after all behaved honestly, as you would have me to. According to your bourgeois morals, I've acted as I should have. I have decided to come and take leave of you. But I can't. After your dance I feel again vanquished by you."

"Leave me!"

"Zoïa Nicholaievna! I'm a new man and stop at nothing. I could kill a man as easily as I could crush you, without the slightest qualms of conscience. If you resist, I'll smother you and possess your dead body. I don't care a hang," said Osetroff, as he took her by the waist. "You've driven me wild, you General's daughter!" And he lifted her in his strong arms, as he would have a feather.

He carried her to the bed-room, hurting her by the pressure of his muscular arms and bending his flushed face to hers. His dark eyes gleamed.

Zoïa Nicholaievna understood that resistance was useless.

The child, roused out of its sleep by the sound of the heavy foot-steps, began crying in its cradle.

"You should be ashamed of the presence of the child," Zoïa whispered.

"I don't care a hang!" Osetroff replied angrily as he threw Zoïa on the bed.

She made an effort to cry for help, but her voice gave way, and she fell into a swoon.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

XXII

ON the 13th of December Sablin received the manifesto addressed by the Emperor to the army and to the Fleet, in which the plan and the object of the war were explained. The words, expressed in the noble traditional Russian style, spoke of the Emperor's firm resolution to continue the war to final victory over the enemy, and of the sacred Russian purpose, tending towards the reestablishment of the Russian orthodox cross at Constantinople, towards the freedom of the Dardanelles straits and towards giving autonomy to Poland.

This manifesto had been issued by the Tsar in answer to Miliukoff's speech delivered at the Duma in November and distributed in numberless copies at the front. It was a noble invitation to the united forces for an attack and victory. That was the sense in which Sablin interpreted it.

Sablin read the manifesto to each regiment of his corps separately. He was desirous that every single soldier might hear and understand the Emperor's words.

After having made the round of the regiments Sablin cantered to the centre of the division and commanded:

"Division, present arms! Attention!"

The regiments quivered with a bristle of bayonets.

"A hearty hurrah to the Supreme Leader of the Russian army!"

Two bands struck up the national hymn and sixteen thousand men shouted with such powerful voices that the snow dropped from the shaggy fir-trees on the outskirts of the forest. The powerful hurrah, accompanied by the national hymn, was repeated more than once and, when they had quieted down, the troops seemed surprised at their own exuberance. Sablin let the regiments file past him. The music thundered, regimental singers were heard singing here and there, while the men walked past in columns and sections.

As the companies came up to their dug-outs, they dispersed noisily, putting aside their guns.

"I say, comrade Pantuchoff! Did you hear what the Com-

TO RED FLAG

mander of the corps said? Does Turkey intend concluding peace?"

"Devil a bit. They've decided to fight until we are in possession of Constantinople."

"I'm damned! We can't even manage to take Kovel, so how the hell are we to get to Constantinople."

At home Sablin found an urgent parcel brought to him by a motor-cyclist of the army headquarters. The messenger, soaked with perspiration and half dead with fatigue—owing to the snow he had ridden the whole night the thirty miles which lay between the army headquarters and the army corps headquarters, in a leather jacket—stood in the yard of the tiny hut occupied by Sablin and Davydoff.

Sablin gave orders to his adjutant to attend to the messenger and retired to his tiny hut, where he proceeded to examine the papers. The first paper was a private wire from Petrograd.

"Come without delay. Most urgent Events of special importance. Details at your lodgings. Repnin, Matzneff, Gritzenko."

Sablin frowned. After the manifesto, the tenor of which was that an attack was shortly planned, after the result of his work in the army corps, a journey to Petrograd did not suit him at all. Evidently those who had required his presence in Petrograd were aware of Sablin's character and of his dislike to go on leave, for a wire came from the army headquarters naming him member of the Petrograd St. George's Committee and directing him to leave for that city at once for the committee-meetings, which began on the 17th December. Samoiloff had sent him, together with the cable, his pass and all the documents required for the railway journey. Sablin handed these papers to Davydoff. He was in Petrograd twenty-four hours later.

He arrived at the Nicholas station at break of day. It was dark still. Lanterns burnt in the station buildings, but the streets were not lighted and a soft misty duskiess was spread over the town, veiling the far end of the Newsky Prospect, so that the Admiralty building vanished from one's sight. Sablin sent his luggage with a porter to his lodging and walked down the Newsky Prospect. He did not feel like going home. The

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business for which he had been called by Repnin, Matzneff and Gritzenko was not likely to require his presence until mid-day and he had a long monotonous forenoon before him. Sablin decided to stroll through the streets of his native town.

He came up to the Kazan Cathedral, which extended towards him its grey stony arms. The columns were covered with hoarfrost and the flower-beds, in front of the gallery, were under snow. The portals of the church were open, the early morning-service having just come to an end, and several early church-goers were descending its wide staircase. Sablin turned to the left and entered the Cathedral, which reminded him of his childhood.

He bought a taper and went towards the Ikon of the Kazan Virgin Mary. He walked slowly along the slippery flags. A woman in a seal-skin lay stretched on the floor by the image. He heard her sob as her shoulders quavered. "She has probably received sad news from the front," thought Sablin. His first movement was to step back so as not to interfere with her grief, but just then she suddenly rose to her knees and turned her face his way.

An unutterable anguish filled her big grey eyes, worn with weeping. They threw a passing, indifferent gaze at Sablin's face and fixed themselves on his shoulder-straps with a wild stare, as though the number on them had staggered her. She clutched at her bosom and would have fallen on the stone floor, had not Sablin caught her.

"Allow me to help you," he said, "you must rest awhile and take a seat."

"No, I'll soon recover my strength. It's nothing. I was taken aback. The army corps in which my husband is serving. You belong to the same corps?"

"I am the Commander of the corps," Sablin said gently.

"Oh, General Sablin!" she exclaimed.

"The same," he replied. "Who's your husband?"

"Lieutenant-Colonel Kosloff," she whispered.

Sablin remembered the bright and golden dawn at the

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trenches of Shpelevri. So that was Zorka, that very Zorka, Kozloff had prayed for with such passion!

"I saw your husband the day before yesterday. He was in excellent health. His regiment is the best of the corps, and is stationed in perfect security in the reserve where it will stay on for another twelve days. Nothing can have happened to your husband."

Sablin watched the young woman. The news about her husband seemed to make no impression on her. The same unspeakable grief showed in her eyes and she started weeping afresh.

"I know, I know," she said. "I have received his letter. It's I who am in question. For God's sake save me. I don't wish to die: I'm so young yet."

Sablin asked himself whether she had not perhaps taken poison, to such an extent did her face seem distorted by suffering.

"What is the matter with you? I am ready to help you as far as lies in my power."

She looked up at him with a look of helpless entreaty.

"The circumstances are so unusual that I don't know how to explain them to you. I can't be saved," she exclaimed in despair.

"But will you take me home," whispered Zoia Nicholaievna. "Teach me what to do!"

The woman was interesting. Her tears, her dishevelled hair, her pale cheeks and swollen lids did not affect her charm. She was attractive, owing to her fragile womanliness, and for that very reason Sablin objected to escorting her home. Who knows what she is? He remembered Wertzinsky's cynical hints. What if she were but a clever adventuress? What an impression would it make, if at nine p.m. he found himself in the lodging of his Colonel's wife? He had another look at her, ready to refuse her invitation, but he read such sincere despair in her eyes that he decided to accompany her.

"I consent," he said. "Let's go."

The chamber-maid looked with surprise at Sablin, as she

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helped him off with his coat. She peeped into the parlour and asked Zoïa Nicholaievna, whether she should prepare tea.

"Yes, serve it in the dining-room," replied Zoïa Nicholaievna, as she seated herself on the sofa, close to the arm-chair which she had offered to Sablin.

The street, the lodging with its small rooms, the smartly dressed chamber-maid, the fans on the walls, the palms, photos, engravings recalled various reminiscences of his youth to Sablin's mind and he involuntarily kept on his guard. It was not to seek of a love-episode that he had come.

"I am ready to hear you," he said.

Zoïa Nicholaievna grasped his hand. Hot tears dropped from her eyes as she sobbed nervously.

"I wished to die," Zoïa began with anguish as she looked up at Sablin. "I must die. I spent a sleepless night and thought it well over. I went to pray to the Virgin Mary of Kazan and decided to throw myself into the Fontanka. I had even spotted a hole in the ice close to the Anitchkoff bridge. While I was praying, such a longing to live overcame me!"

She again fell to sobbing and held Sablin's hand as though for support.

"So I prayed, knowing that it was impossible, and, conscious that my fate was irrevocable, I foresaw how I would come up to the hole in the ice, how I would take off my fur-jacket. I was sorry to spoil it. It could be of service to Valia. So I pinned a ticket to the lining with instructions that the jacket should be given to Valia. Then, suddenly, I imagined myself leaning over the railing, and throwing myself into the cold depth. And, I felt as though I had turned into stone. I was conscious that I had no other alternative. I was just rising to go to my fate, when I saw your shoulder-straps and the number of my husband's corps. I could hardly believe that a human being was standing in front of me: I took you for a vision."

She stopped to take breath.

"You did not believe in a miracle?" said Sablin gently. "Wasn't it, however, a miracle that I should have, just at that moment, entered the cathedral and brought you news of your

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husband? The holy healer of our grief knows how to create miracles unperceptibly and how to save those who are in distress."

Her grey eyes filled with tears and she started weeping inconsolably, moaning as small children do.

"And how about that abomination? One of them will come tonight, and tomorrow the other. I'm ill, mind you. They've contaminated me, the scoundrels. I went to see the doctor yesterday. . . . What will come of it? . . . I'm alone. Who's to help me? They come in crowds, drink, kick up a row and then one of them stays behind and does with me what he chooses. It's horrible, disgusting! And what am I to do? Complain? Inform my husband? Is it possible to let one's husband know such things? Alexander Nicolaievitch is capable of killing me and then committing suicide. There's no protection to be looked for anywhere. One of them took me by force and bragged about it to another. Then the other, a hideous Lett! I can't bear the sight of him! He threatened to write to my husband. What was I to do? I was obliged to submit. If you knew how disgusted I am. And this—day after day! Then I fell ill. I had no notion that such diseases existed. What was left to me but death!" she exclaimed dropping her head onto Sablin's hand and pressing her sobbing mouth to it. "And at the same time I don't wish to die! I can't!" she cried.

She sobbed for a while, unable to check herself.

He realized that in her case there could be no question of either love or inclination. It was simply a case of simplicity, bordering on foolishness, and of weakness, outraged by impudent adventurers.

"They pretended that it meant freedom," she went on with scorn, looking at Sablin with moist eyes. "A new life! But I cannot continue such a life. Tonight he'll come. What am I to do? I can't struggle. He's stronger than I. . . . I'll go away. . . . The Virgin Mary has not saved me, I'm unworthy."

"Wait a bit," Sablin said. "All that is quite unnecessary. No one will come to you. No one will be admitted. You say—in the evening. Then from four a.m. until early in the morning

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my servant Timothy, an elderly, strong soldier of the Reserve, will remain on guard in your entrance-hall. He will let no one in. It's quite simple. He'll just tell any casual visitor that your husband has returned. You'll have a good night's rest, and tomorrow. . . . Tomorrow I'll fetch you and take you to a sanatorium in Finland. They'll cure you there and everything will be forgotten. And tomorrow, Zoïa Nicholaievna, you'll hand me a letter for your husband. A nice fond letter, without mentioning a word of your misfortune. You'll write that your lungs are weak and that consumption was to be feared, and that you had to go in for a rather long cure. But mind," Sablin went on with conviction, reliving mentally his tragedy and that of Vera Constantinovna, "mind you, never never mention a single word to him, never give him to understand by the slightest sigh that anything has happened! Let it be your own cross, you must not ruin your husband's life, for you do not yourself know to what an extent he loves you."

"I know," she answered in an undertone. "But how can I go on living now?"

"You can and must. The war will last some time yet, and you will have time to recover. And by then everything will have been forgotten and happiness will return to you."

Zoïa looked with her large sad eyes into the very bottom of Sablin's soul, clutched his hand and was on the point of raising it to her lips, when Sablin took her hand in his and kissed it.

She saw him off, weeping gently.

XXIII

At home Sablin found a note from Matzneff, with the address to which he was to go that night at ten o'clock, and with instructions to knock in a particular way. Sablin frowned. "I'm damned!" he muttered discontentedly. "This has a taste of back-door romance."

He drove over to Tania's school on a short visit. Then he called on an eminent specialist to consult him about Zoïa Nicholaievna, rang up the sanatorium at Raïvolla, ordered a room, promising at the same time to accompany the invalid on the fol-

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lowing day, sent his old servant Timothy to the Pushkinskaja street, found time to see the president on the St. George's Committee; and at ten p.m. he was at the place appointed by Matzneff. He had made up his mind to tell Matzneff of the poor woman's tragedy, that Matzneff should be able to look after her and help her when he, Sablin, would have returned to the front. He had absolute confidence in Matzneff's decency.

On knocking at the door of an unknown lodging at the far end of the Sergeiefskaja, he heard a rustle behind the door and Matzneff's voice inquiring who was there?

"It's I, Ivan Sergeievitch," said Sablin.

"Who are you?"

"Why, Sablin. Can't you hear?"

"There are any amount of Sablins about. What's your Christian name?" Matzneff went on.

"Alexander Nicolaievitch. What tomfoolery, Ivan Sergeievitch. All this is idiotic."

"There's nothing idiotic about it. Who was your first love?"

"Kitty," Sablin replied, unable to restrain his mirth.

The door opened and Sablin found himself in the arms of the old philosopher.

"Welcome, welcome, old man," said Matzneff, "and don't fret. We are living in times when it is advisable to study Sherlock Holmes so as not get into a mess."

Matzneff fixed the door with an iron hook, fastened the door-chain, turned the key in the lock and said:

"That's better. Now we are all assembled."

"Whose is this lodging?"

"It's the lodging of the singer, Morgenstern, Gritzenko's flame, if you remember. However, neither she nor her maid are in. We are by ourselves."

He led Sablin into a small, smartly-furnished sitting-room, where Repnin and Gritzenko were seated, looking very serious. The single lamp, that was switched on, threw its light on the table.

After a few common-place words exchanged between the assembled friends, they seated themselves.

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"Let us begin," said Gritzenko addressing Prince Repnin. "Alexander Nicolaievitch," the latter began, "we have invited you to discuss a rather ticklish and difficult undertaking that must be carried through, so as to save Russia and His Majesty. Will you agree, beforehand, to join us? Can you trust us, your old regimental comrades?"

"I have entire confidence in you, and am as certain that you won't wrong the Emperor as I am that I could never betray him."

"I thank you, Sasha," said Matzneff.

"You are acquainted with the Emperor's last manifesto?" said Repnin.

"I read it the day before yesterday to the regiments of my corps, and it was welcomed by thundering hurrahs."

"Naturally that manifesto should logically have been followed by an order to remove, if not confine, Rasputin and to forbid the Empress to meddle in the affairs of the State," Repnin went on in an undertone. "That has not been done. Of course the accusations as to the Empress being in contact with the Germans have not been proved and I am certain that they are unfounded. However, the more the calumny seems absurd the greater is the belief of the population in its truth. You are acquainted with Miloukoff's speech in the Duma on the 1st of November, a speech full of monstrous lies but which impressed the lower classes. The population is in a state of nervous excitement. We are on the eve of a revolution. The moderate faction insists on a palace-revolution, but the radicals have raised their heads and are aiming at the abolition of the throne. We are on the eve of terrible events, and we must help our Emperor and do that, which he cannot make up his mind to do: we must remove Rasputin."

"He must be killed," Prince Repnin proceeded. "All the measures have been taken to that effect. The mission has been entrusted to . . ." and Prince Repnin bent towards Sablin's ear and whispered a few words.

"That's impossible!" Sablin exclaimed. "No, my friends, keep your hands off. Keep them from such a mad deed. Their

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hands have never shed blood. They won't be able to commit manslaughter, it's physically out of question."

Sablin thought of his nocturnal discussions with Wertzinsky. It is not given to every one to raise himself or to lower himself to manslaughter, and he could not picture to himself how those persons, whom Repnin had mentioned, were likely to do it. One of them was a pale, sickly-looking, sensitive and handsome youth, a connection of the Emperor. The second was a nobleman, very talented, a man of brain, and stout at heart. The third he knew but slightly: an hysterical brawler, an author, a politician, an orator, but by no means a murderer.

"Is it possible that you were unable to find a hireling for the purpose?" he exclaimed.

"My dear, Sasha," said Matzneff. "Everything has been minutely discussed. A hired murderer would not suit us. Besides twice the attempt was made and without success. Don't forget, Sasha, that his power is that of the devil. And only those can fight the devil, who are not afraid of his snares, for whom he is nothing but a dirty, cowardly peasant."

"All is organized," said Repnin. "We three—and we request you to be the fourth—are expected to act as a reserve force in case our aid is required or if it is necessary to destroy all traces. May we count on you, yes or no?"

"Prince . . . Pavel Ivanovitch! Have you ever considered that the murder of Rasputin might be the first step toward revolution?"

"Too late, Sasha," Gritzenko remarked with sadness. "We see no other issue. Will you join us?"

"Certainly. What am I expected to do?"

"Tomorrow night, he has promised to come to a house on the Moïka where he has been invited to a rendezvous with a lady of the best society, whom he has been after for some time. That's where the plot has to be played out. We'll have to stay on duty here."

"Good heavens! What filth!" Sablin exclaimed. "Pimp-work, a snare, treason and murder!"

"Yes, my dear Sasha, politics is no joke," said Matzneff with

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a frown, "but Rasputin isn't a man who can be challenged in a duel and shot with a pistol on equal terms. The fact that the murder will have been perpetrated by such men must raise them in the eyes of the population, will justify them in those of the Emperor and will help in taking the next step, that is, of removing the Empress."

"Alexander Nicolaievitch," Prince Repnin insisted, "we have considered the matter over and over again. There's no alternative. This is not the time for drifting with the current. Tomorrow we shall meet here at the same hour. Knock and use the pass-word: 'revenge.'"

Punctually the next evening Sablin appeared at Gritzenko's lodging. He felt sick at heart and disgusted, as though he were being drawn against his will into a muddy swamp. The night was passed in playing cards: bridge was followed by "macao" at five copecks a point, to while away their time. Gritzenko treated them to wine and cold supper. At two o'clock Matzneff drove off to make inquiries and returned at six in the morning, pale and excited.

"Thank Goodness!" he exclaimed. "All's over. But how complicated it all was, and how different to what we had expected."

"Have they finally succeeded?" asked Repnin.

"Yes, he is dead and done for. Let us hope for ever," said Matzneff, breathing heavily, and proceeded to give particulars.

"They thought at first that he would not come, that he had guessed that something was wrong. At last he arrived and was received by the youngest member in the cellar-flat, which had been purposely furnished for the occasion. He came in, looked about with suspicion and asked straight away 'Where is she?'

"'Upstairs, with the guests. She'll come down presently,' said the youngest.

"He shook his head, looking displeased, but finally gave in.

"Wine and pastry were placed on the table and the wine contained poison. He would neither eat nor drink.

"'I won't have anything,' he said capriciously. 'Let her come

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first. We'll drink together. Why is it so quiet here? Are the guests there? Are they dancing? I don't hear any music.'

"Of course no one was there except the elder member and the member of the Duma. Rasputin seated himself by a table in a corner. It was dusk in the large cellar, furnished, like a sitting-room, with large Turkish sofas and arm-chairs. Some lamps in one corner threw a dim light under the low vaults. As the youngest member afterwards told me, a creepy feeling came over him. All seemed so mediaeval: low ceilings, vaults, Rasputin in his characteristic garb, a short coat with an open collar which showed his silk shirt embroidered by the Empress, cut glass decanters and wine-glasses, small glasses with poison and his favourite wine and pastry.

"Rasputin's eyes glittered like burning coals and he trembled with sensual impatience. As time passed, the conversation waned.

"'You'd better go fetch her, my friend,' Rasputin finally said to the youngest member. 'Why doesn't she come. Tell her that a friend, a good friend is waiting for her.'

"'Very well,' said the youngest, 'I'll go. Meanwhile have a drink to raise your spirits, Grigori Efimovitch.'

"'Raise my spirits? I'm all right as I am.'

"Nevertheless he took a wine-glass and emptied it slowly. You can picture yourself the state of mind of the youngest member! A strong dose of poison, such as would have killed an elephant, had been mixed in the wine. The effect should have been instantaneous. The pastry likewise contained poison.

"'Somehow your wine tastes bitter tonight,' he said, taking a pastry and eating it.

"The youngest member noticed that he had chosen a poisoned one. Again no effect. There he sat smiling and looking at the youngest member with his dreadful, piercing eyes.

"'I say, young man, where is my beauty? If she won't come to me, I'll go to her. They are dancing, you say? I am fond of dancing myself. I expect there are any amount of women? I'll have a look.'

"'Wait, Grigori Efimovitch, I'll better go and fetch her,' said

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the youngest member, who felt that he could not stand it any longer. There sat Rasputin as before, his hooked fingers clutching the arm of his chair, while with the other hand he poured out a second glass of wine from the decanter and drank it, with the same result. The youngest member left the room. The elder member and the member of the Duma were waiting for him on the dark stairs.

"'Well?' asked the member of the Duma, 'has he drunk the wine?'

"'Yes.'

"'Is he done for?'

"'Not a bit. He's in perfect health.'

"'Perhaps he is dead now?'

"'No, I tell you.'

"'Go and have a look.'

"'No, I can't stand it any longer. I did not believe in the Evil spirit, but now I am beginning to.'

"'Well, then I'll go.'

"'Let us go together.'

"The elder member pulled out his revolver and proceeded down the stairs.

"At that very moment the door opened and Rasputin appeared.

"In the light thrown on the stairs by the open door, he noticed the three men and grasped the situation.

"He rushed to the front-door.

"'He'll escape,' cried the member of the Duma in despair. The elder member shot at him. Rasputin returned to the sitting-room, made a few steps and fell to the ground, moaning.

"'Now he's done for,' cried the member of the Duma. 'We must fetch a motor-car and carry him away.'

"The youngest member shivered as though he had the fever. He was of no use any more and was advised to lie down and have a rest. The member of the Duma went into the yard, leaving the entrance-door open. The elder member looked into the sitting-room and nearly went off his head. Rasputin, whom they had considered dead, was sitting on the carpet, supporting

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himself with his hands. He was pale, his hair was dishevelled, his eyes turned wildly in their orbits as he looked about. He caught sight of the elder member and proceeded to raise himself.

“‘Ah,’ he exclaimed, ‘I will tell everything, to the mistress. I’ll tell her that you have killed me,’ and all of a sudden he stood up and in two bounds ran past the elder member to the exit.

“The elder member rushed after him, and collided with the member of the Duma, who had just returned.

“‘Rasputin’s bolted,’ he cried.

“‘You’re mad! Why! He’s dead!’

“‘Nothing of the kind. . . . There he is.’

“A dark shadow was seen creeping along the wall towards the gate. The member of the Duma rushed after him. He was armed with a splendid American revolver. He aimed and shot twice. Rasputin staggered and fell. The member of the Duma ran up to him. Now no doubt was left—he was killed. . . .

“‘The shots were heard in the street,’ said the elder member. ‘There’s a pool of blood on the carpet. We can expect people to come at any moment.’

“‘Don’t worry. We’ll say that we’ve killed a dog,’ said the member of the Duma.

“They called a dog and shot it inside the house, so as to account for the shots. But, as you can well understand, alarm had been raised. Both the police and the watchmen were on their guard, while a long trip and the worry with the heavy corpse lay still in store for them.

“The car advanced and a policeman instantly approached it. The member of the Duma decided to play it boldly and, walking up to the policeman, said:

“‘I’m a member of the Duma. My name is the following. I belong to the conservative faction and am devoted to the Emperor. I’ve just killed Rasputin.’

“‘The Lord be praised! Is it possible?’

“A psychological moment, my friend, which they had to make the best of.

“A soldier came up. He proceeded to make inquiries as to the

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reason of the shooting. The member of the Duma approached him and said:

“‘I have killed Rasputin. Have I done well?’

“‘You couldn’t have done better,’ was the answer. ‘It was high time.’

“‘Help us, my friends, to place him into the car and carry him away.’

“‘With pleasure.’

“And thus the secret ceased to be a secret. The member of the Duma undertook, with the aid of the policeman and the soldier, to carry Rasputin’s body into the car. N. N. acted as driver.

“‘I believe he’s moving,’ said the companion of the member of the Duma.

“‘No, no! He’s dead.’

“Wrapped in his rich fur-coat, Rasputin lay heavily at their feet. They reached a bridge and an unfrozen spot close by, chosen by them beforehand. The place was deserted. A light fog rose from the river. They had a great deal of trouble in lifting the heavy body over the parapet. A black shadow appeared at the further end of the bridge: evidently some watchman or policeman roused by the noise of the car. They started to drop the body over the parapet. The three of them had the greatest difficulty in lifting the heavy weight, but at last they succeeded. A pale face appeared from under the fur-collar. Rasputin clutched the balustrade with his hands.”

“Had he come to life again?” Gritzenko exclaimed excitedly. “The devil!”

“May be or possibly it only seemed so to them. The member of the Duma told me that he heard Rasputin use bad language, as he was hanging on the balustrade. Finally the body was flung across the balustrade and, hitting the water with a dull sound, disappeared.

“So that was the end of it,” said Matzneff, with a heavy sigh.

“No, my friends,” said Sablin leaning his face on his hands, “that’s not the end, but the beginning . . . of the revolution. And to think, oh Lord, whose hands are to be blamed for it!”

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XXIV

ON the 28th of February, 1917, early in the morning, Sablin inspected all the battalions chosen for the attack, and had a long talk with Kozloff and the battalion Commanders. He noticed perfect confidence in the successful result.

"The men, Your Excellency, are impatient to start at once," said an elderly Captain.

"They won't funk it?"

"I don't think so. The enthusiasm is very great. They are all persuaded that we shall be in Kovel on the 1st of March at nightfall."

"The cavalry will," said Sablin.

"We'll not remain behind," Kozloff remarked.

He accompanied Sablin to his car.

"Have you received any letters from your wife?" Sablin inquired.

Kozloff's face beamed.

"A letter is forwarded to me nearly once a week from headquarters. She writes daily. I don't know how to thank you, Your Excellency, for all the interest you have shown her. Thank goodness, it was only an inflammation of the lungs and not consumption. She is on the way to complete recovery."

"The Lord be praised," said Sablin, involuntarily looking down. "At ten I'll come to you at Shpelevri, and at two sharp we'll start."

Sablin returned to headquarters at two o'clock. Davydoff informed him that the Commander of the army wished to communicate with him by direct wire. Sablin crossed the street to a hut where the telephone had been established. General Samoïloff was speaking. The offensive had been postponed.

"It's impossible to put off the offensive," Sablin answered. "The men are longing to advance, a counter-order would extinguish their ardor and a defeat, instead of victory, would be the result. What's taken place?"

"A categorical order from the Commander of the Western front. The offensive has been put off on the whole front."

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"They've lost their heads. The weather is warm. The snow is melting fast. Soon the mud will be such as to prevent all work, until the spring sets in definitely."

"I've got to transmit you the decision of the Commander of the Western army and of the Supreme Headquarters. The offensive is postponed, and the reasons are unknown to me. Don't leave your post. Be ready at any moment to be called to the telephone. So long."

The connection was cut off.

"Is that all?" Sablin asked of the telephone-assistant.

"That's all," the official replied as he rose from his stool. He was a typical telegraph-official of the old stamp. He looked sternly at the soldier sitting at the Morse-machine and said to him:

"Bislentieff, leave us for a while."

The soldier rose with a smile and left.

"Your Excellency," the official whispered, "allow me to inform you that they are, for some reason or other, keeping secret the fact that there are great disturbances in Petrograd. The soldiers are in mutiny. What is happening there no one knows. Maybe the revolution has broken out by this time. The Emperor is said to have left the Supreme Headquarters."

"Not a word about it for the present!"

"I'll be as dumb as a fish, Your Excellency."

Sablin gave instructions to inform the regiments that the offensive had been postponed, and the news was everywhere received with surprise and disappointment. The day that Sablin had expected to be full of excitement, in the expectancy of the coming fight, proved insipid and endless. Sablin returned to his hut and paced to and fro in his small room. At eleven he was summoned to the telephone. Pestretzoff wanted him at Army Corps Headquarters. Sablin hastened to his car and was soon on his way.

Pestretzoff received him at once. He showed him into his office, carefully closed the door and approached his table, then returned to the door, which he opened abruptly. His orderly was standing outside, evidently eaves-dropping.

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"What are you doing here?" said Pestretzoff.

"Nothing. I thought you might need me."

"Off you go!"

"There, you see, Sasha," Pestretzoff observed, "that's the beginning. . . . I don't exactly myself know why I asked you to come. I simply longed to have a talk with an old friend. I know nothing. There are riots in Petrograd. A collision between the police and the troops has taken place, I believe owing to scarcity of food-stuff, or something. There is no news from Supreme Headquarters, no instructions. That's easily explained. He who does nothing is not likely to make blunders, and to err at the present moment would mean to risk one's neck, or one's post or standing, at the very least."

Pestretzoff looked through a heap of dispatches and at last produced a telegram.

"By the bye I've received a wire. The Commander-in-Chief of the Western front is afraid that the disorders are likely to contaminate the army, and on the strength of it wishes more union and intercourse between the officers and the soldiers. That's all. . . ." On the 9th of March, Sablin's old servant Timothy arrived with newspapers and a letter from Matzneff, giving a detailed account of the Revolution in Petrograd and the Tsar's forced abdication.

It was on a warm spring day. The snow was melting rapidly. The 204th division was drawn up in reserve order with the purpose of swearing fidelity to the Temporary Government. Sablin had, that very morning, received instructions from the Commander-in-Chief of the army to be present at the ceremony. Pestretzoff feared lest the soldiers might refuse to swear fidelity and insisted on Sablin's explaining to the troops that the Emperor had abdicated the throne of his own free will, that the Grand Duke Michael had followed suit and that a Constituent Assembly would shortly be called together for the purpose of deciding the future form of Government in Russia, that there was no reason for any feeling of uneasiness and that, if the people chose to be governed by an Emperor, their wish would be fulfilled.

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Sablin read the insipid manifesto with reserve, and without the zest that he had formerly shown on similar occasions, and said that, as Russia could not be left without some sort of government, the Temporary Government had for the time being taken on itself the burden of power and that the soldiers were to swear fidelity to the same.

He watched the faces of the soldiers. They seemed thoughtful, many of them bowed their heads, and Sablin said to himself: "the nation has taken upon itself the burden of self-government and is now hesitating."

He rode aside, dismounted and lit a cigarette. The priest came forward and, placing himself before the front, proceeded to read the words of the oath in a monotonous tone of voice, whereupon the officers and then the soldiers came up in a file and affixed their signatures.

Sablin was on the point of retiring, when he was suddenly startled by noise and loud voices. A small group of soldiers was coming in his direction from the woods, shoving an officer disrespectfully in front of them. Sablin was surprised when he noticed, on their shoulder-straps, the number of Kozloff's regiment and recognized Ermoloff. Those very soldiers, who had worshipped their officer and with whom he had so intimately lived at the front, were now pushing him roughly and uncereemoniously.

"What's happened? How dare you?" Sablin exclaimed.

The soldiers came up to Sablin, surrounded by a crowd of men who had already sworn fidelity and now gaped and listened to what was going to happen.

"Your Excellency," a young soldier with an insolent face began, without leaving hold of Ermoloff's overcoat. "Allow me to report to you, that, while all were swearing fidelity, Lieutenant Ermoloff suddenly retired and went to the forest."

"That means, that he refuses to swear fidelity," another soldier observed.

"To begin with, I forbid you to touch an officer and order you to go back to your ranks," Sablin cried.

None of them moved. Kozloff, pale as death, shoved himself

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through the crowd and placed himself by Sablin's side. Sablin noticed that he had opened the holster of his revolver and had slipped the revolver forward.

"I have sworn fidelity to my Emperor," Ermoloff said in a firm voice, "and shall swear it to no one else."

"There, you see!" some voices exclaimed. "The Emperor has abdicated of his own free will, the nation has been obliged to take up self-government, and he refuses to serve the nation."

"To your places," Sablin cried wrathfully.

"I say, comrades, we ought to ascertain, whether the General himself has sworn fidelity. Maybe he likewise objects to serve under the red flag."

"Haven't you heard the General's order," Kozloff remarked. "Do you intend to revolt?"

"It's not we who are revolting, but those who refuse to take their oath. They ought to be arrested."

"Arrest them! Arrest them!"

"And the General likewise."

"Right you are, boys."

"There's no Emperor any longer, there are no masters; arrest the General!"

"Forward, boys. Seize them."

The situation was becoming serious. The foremost kept back, not daring to lay hands on their army-corps Commander, but the crowd began pushing from behind. Shrill whistles rent the air.

"Wait a bit, comrades!" a slightly lisping voice exclaimed from the crowd, and Sablin knew it for Wertzinsky's. "Lynching is not the way of a free nation. You were wrong in arresting tovaristch Ermoloff. He's as free a citizen as you are, and it's his own look-out whether he wishes or not to swear fidelity. No one forced you to do so either. Tovaristchi! The moment has come when you must prove that you are worthy of the great liberty which has been gained by the coarse hands of the soldiers and of the workmen! You must not defile these pure moments of the great revolution by violence. Let us separate in peace, tovaristchi, with the certitude that some persons

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do not side with us. These will be looked upon by us with utter disdain. To your dug-outs, comrades. The red banner has replaced the Two-headed Eagle of tyranny and arbitrariness!"

The crowd began to disperse.

"I implore you, Your Excellency, to leave the corps," Kozloff said. "The men are crazy. They are sure to come to their senses again and will then pray you on their knees to forgive them."

"Mount my orderly's horse and accompany me," said Sablin to Ermoloff. "It's not safe for you to remain among them."

"I fear nothing, Your Excellency," Ermoloff replied. "I don't even fear death. Life is no more worth living!"

"Your life may yet be needed! Come!"

They rode past the dispersing soldiers in silence. Hardly any of the soldiers saluted Sablin. They said nothing, but looked sulkily at their superiors.

XXV

At Corps Headquarters Sablin found all in confusion. Radio-officials, telegraphers, soldiers of the bicycle and motor-cycle-section were talking loudly outside. He looked sternly at the soldiers and entered his hut. Davydoff, pale as a sheet, and smoking hard, was pacing to and fro.

"What's up, Sergei Petrovitch?" Sablin inquired.

"I very nearly thrashed the telegrapher and now regret not having done so," Davydoff replied.

"But what's happened?"

"Well, you see, a message was received tonight by radio entitled 'To all whom it concerns, to all sections, companies, squadrons, batteries, etc., be it known' a lot of rubbish. The news that discipline is abolished. The declaration of soldiers' rights. Mind you, Your Excellency, not their duties, but their rights! The soldier has the right to go wherever he chooses to, to travel first-class, and it is not even mentioned whether a ticket for that purpose is required, the military salute is no longer necessary and his superiors, outside drill, are not to be looked upon as such."

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"Who signed it?"

"The Committee of the Soldiers' and Workmen's deputies."

"How was it forwarded?"

"That's just the question! It seems that it isn't the first. The radio works incessantly at night. What's to be done!"

"You must simply lay it away, as a document of the present muddled times."

"That's easily said, Your Excellency. The matter is, however, that they seem to have the lead. Have you heard of the celebration at Moscow, of the revolution and of the abdication of the Tsar? The head of the garrison, Adjutant-General B., was invited by the soldiers to be present at the review. He made his appearance, but as he had nothing red to adorn him, his adjutants drew his attention to the fact, whereupon one of the cringing varlets of the revolution turned the General's red-lined overcoat inside out and presented it to B. The General arrayed himself in it. A fine Cardinal!"

Towards evening instructions were received from the Headquarters of the army to explain to the soldiers that order No. 1 was only meant for the various sections of the Petrograd garrison, which had lifted the revolutionary banner. The soldiers lost their heads entirely. The government evidently placed betrayal of the oath, betrayal of the Emperor, street riots, above the serious, heavy work at the front.

Three days later peremptory instructions were given along the whole front to apply the order No. 1 to the whole army, whereby the troops were freed of discipline and were transformed into an armed herd. Vague reports of an impending St. Bartholomew's Eve, during which all the officers were to be slain just because they were officers, were spread among the troops.

Sablin summoned Davydoff.

"We, the Commanders can no longer serve a government of this sort," he said. "Have an order issued, in the usual form, to the effect that I am leaving the service, stating as main reason the utter impossibility of commanding the troops in such circumstances."

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"Are you right, Your Excellency, in doing this?" Davydoff said. "If all follow your example—"

"That would be splendid," said Sablin. "If all the officers were to leave the service, the government would desist from destroying the army."

"Would it not, on the contrary, precipitate the St. Bartholomew's Eve affair?"

"Maybe, but it can't be helped in any case. I wish to leave the service so as not to witness and share in the final dissolution of the army and the ruin of Russia. Prepare the papers and have Ermoloff sent to me."

"Very well, Your Excellency."

Shortly after Ermoloff entered the hut.

"Lieutenant Ermoloff," Sablin began, "the Nth cavalry division with its sharp-shooter regiment will pass through our village. I have written about you to the head of the division and to the Commander of the sharp-shooter regiment to accept you. You will join them and follow them."

"Your Excellency," Ermoloff said firmly. "Allow me to remain."

"Why?" Sablin objected, and looked hard at the young man. Where had he come across such pale faces with large brilliant eyes? Where had he seen the nobility of features. . . . He recalled the pictures of the XVth and XVIth centuries representing Italian monks. He thought of those holy Sebastians and Anthonies attached to stakes and pierced by arrows. The eyes of a martyr, ready to sacrifice himself for his faith, for his ideal, were directed on Sablin.

"Allow me to return to my company," Ermoloff said. "They won't harm me. My presence is needed there. It is my duty to stay with them to the end."

"How old are you?" Sablin inquired with a feeling of admiration.

"I am twenty years of age," Ermoloff replied.

"Go and the Lord have mercy upon you."

At three a.m. the clerk brought Sablin the papers.

"I was at a loss how to write the order, Your Excellency," he

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said. "Formerly such documents were addressed to His Majesty. I have addressed it to the minister. I have left out the title of 'Excellency.' Will that do?"

"I'll look it through," Sablin said. "Leave it here."

The clerk retired and Sablin proceeded to study the papers which gave a full account of his military career. It had been a pleasant life for the officers in the regiment, with its discipline, drill, its band and mess. A regimental family with its petty interests and reviews; with court-balls and five o'clock teas, with horse-shows, races and field-exercise. Everything for the officers. . . . And how about the men?

The men? A quarter-pound meat-ration, rich cabbage-soup, well cooked porridge, two pounds and a half of bread, an elegant uniform, the tender love of cooks and chamber-maids and pleasant prospects of returning to their homes. A quiet life with no intricate problems, a life of petty interests confined to a good night's rest, a cup of "vodka," and the fear of a rebuke or punishment. A life full of excitement and activity, the complicated ritual of military life.

Their life could likewise not be considered a hardship under the Two-headed Eagle.

And now? . . .

The long summer-night was waning. Candle after candle had burnt to the end and Sablin did not sleep. The pale morning dawned through the window of the hut, opening to the view the muddy road, the posts of the broken fence, the black fields and melting snow on the slope of the hill, and the distant forest in the back-ground. The early spring-dawn brought a yet deeper sadness into Sablin's soul.

Surely the Two-headed Eagle was still in existence? What could replace it? The strains of the band, playing the well-known regimental march of the dragoon regiment of his division, became audible, as well as the noise of the horses' feet splashing along the muddy road and the command of "attention." The Commander of the regiment, perceiving the flag of the army corps Commander, had evidently hoped that Sablin

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would come out to greet his division. Sablin put on his overcoat, fastened his sabre and approached the window.

No, he would not go out to greet them.

Close by the very hut, behind the trumpeters, the colours appear. The Two-headed Eagle on its pike is covered over with a red casing—and wide red ribbons dangle from its top. The soldiers wear red bows in their button-holes, and similar bows are attached to the chests of the Commander of the regiment and to that of the head of the division.

No, Sablin will not go out to them. He had commanded the division under the Two-headed Eagle and refuses to greet the bloody, red flag. He does not recognize revolutionary soldiers. Even stout von Veber, the Commander of the hussar regiment, has a red bow, the order of cowardice, attached to his chest.

The sounds of the horses' hoofs of the Cossack regiment become audible and the faces of the men with their red bows bear an impudent expression. Red ribbons adorn that very same flag which had served during the attack of Jeliesnitzza, and the Two-headed Eagle is hidden from the view. Sablin took up his pen and was on the point of signing the resignation, when the vision of Ermoloff rose before his mind's eye. He thought of those clear honest eyes on the pale face, the eyes of a martyr. And how about them, the officers? Those who, like Christ, had picked up their cross and ascended their Golgotha? Would he, Sablin, drop his cross and abandon them? Would he be capable of not partaking, in their midst, of the sufferings of the soul, of the horrors of the coming Bartholomew's Eve?

Sablin threw away his pen and tore the document that he was on the point of signing.

PART V

I

FOR a while after the revolution the sentries continued to stand immovably on the observation points, the men never parted with their masks, the reserves were always watchful, the chemical detachment daily verified all the appliances for gas defence. Although the famous order No. 1 had been sent into the regiments, very little attention had been given it. In speaking to the soldiers the word 'thou' continued to be used; when necessary, strong language was employed; the lazy and slack men were threatened with being sent to the front lines. The officers inspected the rifles, the non-commissioned officers shook their fists at those whose arms were dirty or rusty, the sentries were relieved every two hours exactly and the masses did not realise what had taken place. In the companies of the reserve the anthem and the prayer "Save us, oh, Lord!" were no longer sung after the last post and "Our Father" alone was to be heard. The men saluted as before; and new terms of addressing their seniors, as Mr. Lieutenant or Mr. Captain instead of "Your Honour," were used only by the most easy-going men.

Indeed the men noticed the change only after the return from Petrograd and G. H. Q. of the soldiers, who had been sent as delegates from the regiments to the meetings of the representatives of the front and of the army.

A common man called Ikaeff, recently promoted to the rank of ensign from that of sergeant, had arrived and with him a soldier, who had formerly been a schoolmaster. He had been deported to Siberia for the part he had taken in the revolution of 1905, had however escaped and since then had lived in Germany. His name was Voronkoff. Each of them reported to the soldiers all the events that had taken place in Russia and taught them how they were to comport themselves.

Ikaeff had assembled a company in a narrow junction of

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trenches and sitting on the banquette at the sentry's feet talked enthusiastically about the southern meeting at Lutsk of the delegates from the front.

The sentry, looking through the breast-work at the green fields, listened to what Ikaeff was saying, gazed at the darkish lines of the enemy's barbed wire and could not understand how, after all that had happened, the war could still continue, that it was still necessary to stand on guard and watch the Germans working, either mending their wire or cutting passages through it. The Germans worked in a quiet, business-like way, and an officer could be seen pacing behind them and from time to time he could be heard shouting at them. Now was the very moment to shell them, but evidently the same feeling of good-natured laziness had taken hold of the artillery observer. Let them go on with their work. What was the sense of killing now, when such freedom had been proclaimed and when such unheard of things were taking place.

"I came to Lutsk, comrades," Ikaeff was saying enthusiastically, "and already soldiers were waiting for us on the platform. Each of them had a red bow pinned to his overcoat. They met us and inquired if we were the delegates of the corps. 'Show us your credentials!' they said. They verified them and then took us to the palace in motor-cars as if we were Generals. They gave us red bows, saying: 'Comrades, this is the sacred sign of freedom, you must wear it on your breasts!'"

"There you are!" said one of the listeners with a deep sigh. "And when Setrakoff put on such a bow, which a Jew had given him, and General Sablin saw it, he shamed him saying: You are not a girl to wear ribbons and bows! It is no part of the uniform! He threatened to send him to the front lines."

"He is a General of the old régime," Ikaeff said, spitting out the husks of sun-flower seeds. "He lacks discernment. He does not understand the achievements of the revolution! There I met real Generals, comrades! We arrived at the palace. And what do you think, comrades! I would not believe my eyes! The sentries were sitting, eating sun-flower seeds, joking with the passers-by, their rifles against the wall! Well, I asked, what

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is the meaning of all this? Won't they be tried for such behaviour? But they only laughed at me, saying: What, comrade? Is it so bad? This is not the old régime. These are free soldiers! and a free sentry—he fulfills his duty, but orders that he may do whatever he likes!"

"That's right!" sighed someone in the crowd.

"That's right!" thought the sentry and, turning his back to the enemy, followed attentively what Ikaeff was relating.

Voronkoff was running fussily from one dug-out to another. He had been in Petrograd and had arrived full of the daring passion of the revolution.

"Comrades!" he would say breathlessly, his nervous face twitching, "you are duped, comrades, and you are betrayed. You are kept on purpose as under the old régime. What does it mean? The giving of titles, the rendering of the salute and the officers who scold you as before! Comrades, cast it all off, you must begin to democratise the army. In Petrograd all the chiefs are elected. Such a General as Sablin is not possible there. He would have been tossed on the bayonets a long time ago. I don't see any of the achievements of the revolution here. You must assemble at a meeting and demand the fulfilment of the order No. 1. The rights of the soldier are not observed, you are the same slaves as before. Where are your red banners of the revolution with the sacred watch-words that I saw in Petrograd? It is always the same with you, comrades—the Tsar and God! Oh, comrades! it is not for this that we have dethroned the Tsar and that we have learned at last that there is no God at all and that He was only invented by the bourgeoisie and the capitalists to keep the people in slavery and darkness. Comrades, I saw the sacred words on the red banners: 'Peace to the cottages—war to the palaces!' 'Down with the war!' It is the capitalists alone who desire the war and we are their slaves no longer. Let us hoist red banners and under them and with them we will fight for the rights of the people and for the achievements of the revolution!"

Suddenly the order No. 1, that had until then seemed mean-

ingless and incomprehensible, had become of vital importance and had completely revolutionized the soldier's life.

The sentry, who had listened to Ikaeff, had long finished his two-hours watch, Ikaeff had gone away and was sleeping, the men had dispersed in the dug-outs, but no relief came. Meanwhile, in the dug-out of the guard, a young ensign argued with the men, urging them to relieve their comrade.

"Sedoff," he said, "it is already five minutes past eleven, you must go and relieve Kovaleff."

"It does not matter, Mr. Ensign, he can stand a little longer, my chest hurts."

"Then go you, Pankratoff."

"Catch me! Why should I go if it is Sedoff's turn, I have stood all night. He can stand till twelve and then the 8th company will relieve us."

But at twelve o'clock the 8th company did not arrive: it was in no hurry. There the men were listening open-mouthed to Voronkoff's stories. It was 4 o'clock when Kovaleff was relieved.

Gas-masks, great-coats, cartridge-pouches were scattered about the dug-outs and the soldiers did not bother to clean the rifles. The bucket, supposed to be kept full of water in case of a gas-attack, was empty; the tow was damp; the petroleum had been carried to the different dug-outs and was used there and the brushwood was flooded. When the company's C.O. came and scolded the men, none of them stirred to carry out his orders and whistles and shouts followed him as he left the dug-out. He distinctly heard the men scream: "Wait a bit, and you will see Eremeieff's night," meaning St. Bartholomew's night. The men murmured and whispered anxiously in their dug-outs. The meaning of all the speeches and of all that was taking place in Petrograd and in Lutsk was one and the same—the war was finished. They must return home and bring to their cottages the long-promised peace.

The 16th company had got a piece of red linen and Voronkoff was writing on it in large letters: "Down with the war." It was decided to place this banner of the revolution in the

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night on the fort nearest to the enemy, so that he could also learn of the sweetness of the Russian Revolution.

It was whispered everywhere that maybe the land would be divided and distributed in their absence, and what was the use of continuing the war now when there was so much land to be had and full freedom, without masters and without the Tsar.

Slowly and heavily as mill-stones worked the soldiers' brains and they could not master all that had taken place. Usually in such cases the soldier turned to the officer for an explanation, but it appeared that now he could trust the officer no longer.

An important meeting was fixed for the 19th of March in the 204th Division. The Division was to elect its delegates to report its wishes to the Temporary Government and to offer the Government its congratulations on the revolution.

Nearly all the officers and the representatives of the entire corps were present and Sablin himself was there.

When he entered the big dug-out—the church and the riding school of the 198th regiment—all rose and silence reigned.

They had elected as chairman the Doctor Sophia Lvovna Gordon, a handsome Jewess. They had chosen her because she had nothing in common with the old régime. She was the superintendent of the field hospital of the City Union and had a long-standing weakness for Sablin. The presidium was formed of officers and N.C.O.'s. of special merit, the majority of whom were decorated with the Cross of St. George. At Sophia Lvovna's suggestion, which met with the general approval, Sablin was offered the honorary chairmanship and he was invited to take a seat near the handsome Jewess.

"In the order of the day," began Sophia Lvovna, "stand: The election of a delegate and his associates for the purpose of sending them to Petersburg; the communication of the Division's answer to the following questions: the organization of the Russian State, the attitude towards the war, military discipline, the decision concerning agrarian questions, all to be reported to the Temporary Government."

"And to the Soviet of the Soldiers' and Workmen's deputies," a voice was heard speaking from the seats.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"Comrades, I request you not to speak from your places," Sophia Lvovna said, "I suppose that we must begin by electing the delegates, so that having heard all that will be said here they may take down what is necessary. The vote must be done by ballot. But so as not to have our opinions differ, and to elect a delegate more or less unanimously, I propose that you name those whom you consider worthy to be the deliverers of the opinions of the Division."

Complete silence followed.

"General Sablin," said an ensign promoted from the rank of sergeant and decorated with four crosses of St. George, "because General Sablin has always been a father to us, he is also a General of merit and a knight of St. George, he knows our wants and takes care of us."

"Comrades," Voronkoff's nervous voice was heard saying, "we have just thrown off the oppression of the cursed Tsarism and nevertheless we still see on the General's shoulder-straps the initials of the autocratic Emperor. At present Nicolashka. . . ."

"Stop," Sablin shouted, "don't dare speak of the Emperor in such terms! There is no Emperor any more, but I shall not allow his memory to be insulted."

"There, comrades, you see," Voronkoff said moving away.

"Voronkoff you are wrong," Wertzinsky shouted from his place.

"General Sablin and Colonel Kozloff, as knights of St. George," the ensign repeated once more.

"The Crosses of St. George have nothing to do here," screamed someone from his place.

"Then Ensign Osetroff!"

"The Captain Wertzinsky!"

"The Ensign Gaiduk!"

"The soldier Voronkoff!"

"Voronkoff, comrade Voronkoff!"

"The candidates have been named," Sophia Lvovna said, "let us vote."

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The assembly became restless and noisy. Sablin rose and left the dug-out. Davydoff followed.

Voronkoff was elected delegate from the Division by a crushing majority. Osetroff, Gaiduk and Shlossberg were elected as his associates. Sablin glanced into the dug-out when the voting was already finished and the Division Commander as well as many of the officers were shaking hands with Voronkoff and congratulating him.

Sophia Lvovna looking handsome and animated, drove over to report to Sablin about the meeting. She gazed at him with caressing and languid eyes, as she read her notes.

The majority of the officers had declared themselves for a constitutional monarchy, the soldiers for separate republics, similar to the United States, but without one general president for all the states; all the officers and part of the soldiers—for the war till its victorious conclusion in complete harmony with the Allies. The crushing majority of the soldiers—for immediate peace and the discharge of the men. Many officers and all the soldiers were for the democratisation of the army and the establishment in it of the right of election. The soldiers' distrust of the officers clearly manifested.

"General," Sophia Lvovna said, placing her strong, white, well-groomed hand on Sablin's and bringing her handsome face close to his, her eyes suddenly full of tears, "go away, don't stay here."

The dark eyes gazed deep into Sablin's soul.

"Please, do! It will be nasty here. Oh! Alexander Nicolaievitch, they are so exasperated against you and against all the officers that it frightens one. Something terrible will surely take place."

"But you rejoiced so, Sophia Lvovna, at the revolution?" Sablin said nervously. The proximity of the handsome woman excited him.

"Oh, I imagined it quite different. This is not a revolution. It is the roughest mutiny."

The beautiful hand trembled on Sablin's. The handsome

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

face was near, the large, languid eyes looked at Sablin with love and pity.

"Thank you, Sophia Lvovna," he said, "but it is not in my habit to escape when there is danger. I won't abandon my duty and where should I go? It is the same everywhere."

She stood near the table, the lower part of her face was lit by the two candles that were placed upon it. Shadows flitted over it. She looked once more at Sablin.

"General," Sophia Lvovna whispered, "I shall tell you a secret which may cost me my life. Our religion teaches us: '. . . and slay the worthiest gentile! Crush the serpent's head!' Now our people are the rulers. . . . You are the worthiest. . . . Oh! I tremble for you. . . . I love you so. . . . Take care of yourself!"

It was so quiet in the cottage that Sablin thought he could distinguish the beating of his heart. Sophia Lvovna stood with drooping head. Pallor suited her oriental type. Her long eyelashes fluttered.

Two minutes passed. The watch which lay on the table ticked them off.

"Good-bye," Sophia Lvovna said, extending her hand.

"Good-bye," Sablin said and kissed the white hand.

She crossed the clay floor with heavy steps. He could hear her call the coachman, and the noise of the wheels as the carriage drove off.

Sablin sat down on a stool near the table and resting his elbows upon it, whispered:

"And slay the worthiest gentile! What does it mean? Or is it really so? The seventy sages hinted at by Wertzinsky whom nobody knows and the Russian revolution led from the depths of Zion. A mystery? But it is far better not to think!"

The hut was yet full of the smell of perfume.

Sablin went out into the yard and called Davydoff.

II

THE soldier Pantuchoff, a peasant of the Government of Penza, the father of five children, took his post. Resting his

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elbows on the breast-work and placing his rifle beside him, he looked at the sunset. It was a warm spring evening. Just before they had had a heated dispute in the sentries' dug-out regardless of the enemy's firing. The Lieutenant Löwenthal, of German origin, endeavoured to prove that the land could not be simply taken away from its former proprietors because many of the landowners had bought their land and it would be most unjust to do so, but that the State was obliged to buy it and give it over to the peasants granting them payment by installments to their Bank.

The Ensign Gaiduk said on the contrary that the land must be taken gratis from the former landowners, as they had enjoyed it long enough. At the height of this animated dispute the section corporal sent Pantuchoff to take his turn in the trenches. Pantuchoff threw on his great-coat carelessly and, leaving his cartridge-pouch and his gas mask, went to the breast-work, carrying only his rifle.

Pantuchoff's turn had long finished, but nobody came to relieve him. That did not trouble him much. He had slept well in the dug-out, warmed by the men's presence. The night was fine, just cool enough and it was so pleasant to dream under the starlit sky.

"What a perfume. Spring is in the air. It would be fine to go home for Annunciation or for Easter and with God's blessing settle everything with the landowners and begin to work on the new shares. But the German does not leave off! That is the result of the officers' martinet. He is frightened. Yes! How cleverly we have freed ourselves! That was well done, but there must be no return to the past. The fellows say that all the landowners must be killed all at once. But it is dangerous. Suppose we have to answer for it? What then? Well, what a noise they are making there! Quite like engines letting off steam. And where did he get those machines. He did not have them before."

Suddenly a horrible thought flashed through his mind: "They were preparing a gas-attack! Gas! They had already begun it."

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

And all that he had been taught, all that he had rehearsed several times in the presence of General Sablin rose suddenly in his mind. First of all the mask had to be put on, then the alarm given along the whole front, the artillery had to be notified, the bonfires lit, sprays of chemical mixtures were to be thrown out at the approaching waves of gas, oxygen given to those who were suffocating.

"Good Lord! Where is my mask? Holy Virgin save us sinners! What will happen? What will happen!"

Pantuchoff threw himself about in the trench, not attempting to do anything. He wanted to launch a rocket, to give the alarm, he ran to the box containing them, but it was flooded with water. Nobody had carried it out during yesterday's rain, although someone had spoken about doing so. And the matches were floating in the water. Pantuchoff's first movement was to telephone to the battery, but he was so scared that he could not remember where the telephone was. It seemed to him that he already smelt the gas and then he remembered that the fellows had let out all the oxygen for fun. "And how sour it was," thought Pantuchoff, "and how light,—you drank it like lemonade!"

He ran into the nearest dug-out and flung the doors wide-open. A small lamp was burning on the boards. Eight men, completely undressed were engrossed in a game of cards. The rest of the men were sleeping soundly, snoring in different tones.

"Gas, comrades, gas," Pantuchoff shouted, looking about wildly for his mask. But he could not see it among the clothes and underwear that was lying all over the place.

"What are you inventing?" shouted an old soldier, drawing in a heap of banknotes.

"Honour bright, comrades, the German has sent over the gas. It is making a terrible noise!"

The men jumped up, somebody upset the lamp and it went out; they were suddenly plunged into darkness. The men were fighting, trying to find their clothes and wrenching them from each other.

The faint sounds of the gong were to be heard from the

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neighbouring fort. One of the men, looking like a demon in his gas-mask, was knocking against a sheet of iron with a broken hoof and the blows resounded sorrowfully and dully in all the trenches. The men began bustling and hurried out, the majority without gas-masks, which they had left behind in the dug-outs of the reserve when they took up their turn.

A young officer, lately promoted from a military school, whose mask the men had just taken away, was telephoning with tears in his voice:

"Ivan Fedorovitch! Ivan Fedorovitch! Mr. Captain. It is you? Oh, God! Hurry and open fire! Orders No. 4: gas-attack. What do you say? They don't allow? The guard is our Division? But tell them we are perishing!"

Part of the company, directed by the officers, had put on their masks and were drawing up behind the breast-works. Those who were without masks ran towards the river. Far behind it could be seen the yellow flashes of the guns, and the roar of the artillery that had been sent to reinforce the corps was heard. The delegates from the infantry had given in at last to the appeals of the men in the trenches. But it was too late.

A thick fog was spreading in the dusk over the black, damp earth. A light, westerly wind was driving it straight on to the trenches. It rolled up to the poles of the wires and they were immediately swallowed by the fog. It was evident that no one could escape from its rapid advance.

The gong that had been ringing all along the line of the trenches was silent. The young officer, who had telephoned, ran out of the breast-work, without either mask or cap, and ordered "rifles down" to be in readiness for the attack. Some of the men had tied handkerchiefs over their mouths and stood without masks. Those were the best soldiers of the old time.

It smelt of sour, suffocating chemicals and of bitter almonds; a yellow shroud enveloped the faces and the damp willow hedge before the trenches. The faces without masks were green and the eyes, suddenly opened widely, looking terrified.

What is it? the young officer thought. He felt that he was losing all control of his movements, and his fingers twitched

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

convulsively. He thought he saw his beloved mother, as he had seen her last at his home in Petersburg, when she had blessed him before he left for the front. . . . "Mother," he was about to exclaim, when he fell back with a terrible expression on his convulsed face. People were dropping all around. Their sudden death, the expression of unhuman terror on their yellowish faces, utterly unlike those of the ordinary dead, terrified those who gazed upon this scene of horror through the dim glasses of their masks. The men began to leave their positions. They were making their way towards the river. They came across separate groups of men lying in heaps along the road and on the field. They were the bodies of those who had run away first and whom the waves of gas had overtaken in their flight.

It was the approach of dawn. Everything vacillated in the misty greenish gas-waves, that filled and spread over the hollows and cavities. Near the regimental kitchens lay the bodies of the cooks and the corpses of horses. The fires under the kettles were going out.

The bridges on the river were broken. The ice was half-covered by a yellow-greenish sheet of vapour. The gas had not spread any further, dissolved by the dampness of the river. The crowd of soldiers pushed forward on to the ice. But it gave way, cracked, sunk and the people began to vanish in the dark waters, from which rose clouds of vapour. It was not deep, the water hardly came up to the men's waists, but it was impossible to advance.

"To the bridge, to the big bridge, comrades," shouted the men, and without giving a thought to the enemy they rushed up the river to the big bridge which had not been destroyed. Meanwhile, a scanty line of German scouts was penetrating into the trenches. The men in grey coats and low metal casques, from under which peeped the dark faces of demons, holding their rifles at "charge bayonets," dispersed in the trenches. They began shouting at the men who were running along the river-side, causing them to hurry still more towards the bridge.

But it was occupied by a large column of masked men. It

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was the 204th and 209th regiments, which Sablin had hastily assembled and which he led personally to the counter-attack.

It was day-light. The slanting rays of the sun lit up the sandy hillock, behind which lay the fortifications of the Lessischensky place d'armes. The waves of the yellow-greenish fog rolled on the slopes of the hillock like a phantastic serpent creeping on its belly. The landscape seemed unnatural through the glasses of the gas-masks. From the effects of the gas last year's grass was flattened down and had turned dark. The larks that the gas had reached lay dead in the fields. The entire slope of the hill was covered with dead bodies. A carriage stood motionless on the road, the horses had dropped down dead and the soldier on the box had also been suffocated; he was still sitting in his seat bending forward. Seated in the carriage with green faces were the G.O.C. of the Brigade and Colonel Pantuchoff. Further on was an overturned cart which had been evidently upset by the horse in its last agonized struggles and in it were sitting the manager and the paymaster, both of them dead. The morning wind was pulling at the paymaster's black beard.

The men, who had reached the other side of the river, hesitated visibly.

"First Battalion, line of companies with extended intervals to the right of the road," Sablin commanded and his voice had a muffled sound coming from under the mask.

His great-coat as well as his shoulder-straps had turned yellow from the gases, and the Emperor's initials were black.

Sablin stopped to let the leading company pass. Kozloff was leading it. But as soon as the companies extended their intervals they advanced more slowly. They were met by running men wearing masks.

"Stop, comrades!" they shouted in muffled voices, "turn back, all is lost, the strength is on the enemy's side."

Kozloff and Ermoloff continued to advance and the Morochensky regiment followed them silently. The first platoons extended into lines of skirmishers. The German scouts began to come out of the trenches.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

Sablin climbed up the hill and looked through his field-glasses at the battle-field, without lifting his mask.

The Morochnensky regiment, as well as the Pavlinovsky were both nearer the trenches than the Germans. One more effort and the place d'armes would again be occupied by the Russian forces. They would rest afterwards in the fortifications. Notwithstanding the disorderly fire of the Russian artillery, that showed the absence of a good observer, it reached the enemy and the German lines frequently dropped down.

The seconds seemed endless.

Ermoloff, who was in front, continually lifted his gas-mask and shouted loudly:

"Forward, brothers, forward! They are done for."

The measured buzzing of several propellers was heard overhead. Bombs fell with a dull sound, discharging clouds of brown smoke, and overhead was heard the cracking of machine-guns. The men advanced. But at the same time a small group detached itself from the Pavlinovsky regiment. A red flag with black letters waved over it. From time to time one man or another of the group would stop and, lifting his gas-mask, shout out shrilly: "Fall back on to the bridge. Save yourselves!"

The columns stopped. A bomb thrown from an aeroplane exploded in the vicinity of the company of the reserve, killing several men. Sablin drew his revolver and threw himself at the men who were running towards him. He caught a glimpse of the pale face of Osetroff, who had taken his mask off and shouted:

"Arrest the General. He is bought by the Germans. He is a German spy!"

Sablin stopped and aimed at Osetroff, but at the same moment, rough, strong hands caught hold of him from behind and he was surrounded by the crowd carrying the red flag. He recognized Gaiduk, Schlossberg, Ikaeff and Voronkoff by their voices and their shoulder-straps. It was Voronkoff who was carrying the red flag, on which stood: "Down with the war!"

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Sablin was surrounded and violently dragged towards the bridge.

The whole crowd rushed after him. There was a terrible crush on the bridge.

"Not on to the bridge, on to the ice, it will hold," roared somebody's powerful bass.

The men jumped on to the ice, some of them crossing safely; others fell through, struggled amid the blocks of ice and were drowned, others waded out.

Aeroplanes were dropping bombs over the general chaos, and machine-guns crackled. The aeroplanes flew so low that the aviators were visible to the naked eye, but no one attempted to shoot at them. Colonel Davydoff, Kozloff, Lieutenant Ermoloff were being conducted over the bridge in the midst of a dense crowd of soldiers. Nobody had dared to tear off Sablin's shoulder-straps, but those of the other officers had been torn off.

Once over the bridge they removed their gas-masks and without looking back, hastened to reach the forest, hoping to find shelter there from the attacks of the aeroplanes.

Meanwhile the Brigade of German infantry was entering undisturbed into the trenches of the Lessischensky place d'armes. That stronghold a constant menace for Kovel, had been cleared without casualties, except for a few men killed and wounded by the fire of the artillery, and the Germans were preparing to throw several Divisions to the western front. The Nth Army Corps had practically ceased to exist.

III

VORONKOFF had taken upon himself the management of everything in the Staff of the Corps and gave orders with impetuosity and alacrity; he sent for the delegates of all the regiments of the Corps to try General Sablin and Colonel Kozloff; he gave orders to stop the fire of the artillery and addressed Pestretzoff in an imperious tone. Pestretzoff was at a loss what to do; should he send for the Cossacks and have Voronkoff arrested or was he to try and put up with him? He applied to the front

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

for instructions. The Headquarters answered that severe repressions must be avoided, that Sablin was to blame himself for not having taken the initials off his shoulder-straps and for arresting the bearers of red flags. The revolution had to be accepted and it was necessary to be with the people and not to show any opposition. Pestretzoff was advised to persuade Voronkoff to send Sablin to the meeting in the General Headquarters; its members were well intentioned and the whole incident might easily be settled.

Pestretzoff acted accordingly. Sablin, Kozloff, Davydoff and Ermoloff were convoyed to the General Headquarters by an escort under Gaiduk's command.

The men of the Corps were gradually dispersing. Every night five or ten men deserted from each company, generally the best and most reliable soldiers forsaking the front.

"No good can be expected," they said. "A soldier arrests a General, a knight of the Cross of St. George, and the senior Commanders, instead of shooting him, reason with him. Well, what can you expect after that?"

Pantuchoff, who had safely crossed the river and was miraculously saved, related to soldiers who came from his village his plans about the division of the Obolensky estate, and seven of them decided to go home at once. Three days they hid in the woods, advancing cautiously, but when they reached the rear they convinced themselves that there was no need to hide. The soldiers were at the head of everything, the loving word "comrade" was heard everywhere. Russia swarmed with deserters and the word itself sounded proudly.

Pantuchoff and his friends travelled to Penza in a first-class carriage. On the way he occupied himself with cutting off the velvet of the seats as a present for his wife.

"Won't she be pleased," he said to his comrades.

The Russian Army had ceased to exist.

IV

PETERSBURG had gone mad. Women of society, yesterday His Majesty's most faithful subjects, rushed to hear Kerensky

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speak and smothered him with flowers. The crowd looked respectfully when Madame Kerensky, driving in the Imperial carriage drawn by the Tsar's own horses, called at the most expensive shops and dress-makers buying jewelry and ordering herself the most extravagant dresses and lingerie. The papers, in flattering servility, gave pictures of Kerensky, snapshots of his life in the Winter Palace and at the front. He was worshipped and everyone thought him a Russian Napoleon.

Yet in May at Tsarskoie Selo the Polejaeff family, with whom Tania Sablin had come to stay, led the same undisturbed existence as nature herself. Polejaeff who had a large estate in the south of Russia in the Taurid steppes had served three years in the same regiment as Sablin. Later on he had married, had resigned, devoting himself entirely first to his wife and then to his children. He had two sons and one daughter. Paul, the eldest, was twenty years old and Nicolas—nineteen; his daughter Olga was seventeen. Polejaeff's wife had died very soon after the birth of their last child. He sent the boys to the Pages' Corps, and placed his daughter in the Smolny Institute. It was there that she met and became intimate with Tania Sablin.

These good people were Tania's devoted friends, worshipped her father and had chosen him as their hero, who would save the Emperor. They implicitly believed that when he had been saved Russia too would be delivered. The Emperor had abdicated, but that was of no importance in the eyes of Olia and Tania. They knew that the Emperor led the life of a prisoner in the Alexander Palace in Tsarskoie Selo, and living there themselves they dreamt of helping him and when it became possible of rescuing him. They knew that he was guarded by the Sharp-shooter Regiment, and Nika had now joined that very regiment. Pavlik, who was at the front, hoped to do the same. A small plot to save the Emperor was being hatched in the Polejaeff family.

It was a clear summer morning in Tsarkoselky Park, with a blue sky and a sun that seemed full of promises. Later it became unpleasant to walk even in the most frequented alleys,

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

when soldiers' noisy gangs filled the park after dinner. They feared no one. Things so horrible were related about them that they could not even be mentioned before the young girls, but what they guessed made them shrink with disgust.

They dared everything. They had arrested and imprisoned the Tsar. What more was possible?

Olia and Tania, both dressed alike in white low-necked blouses, with dark skirts, had gone out with Miss Proctor, their old English governess; Quick, their collie, was also with them. Both girls walked quickly; the gravel crunched under their feet. Tania carried an English book in a light yellow covering. They passed near the lake, entered a long dark alley of large limes and sat down on a bench.

"Look, Tania," said Olia, "over there at that man. He has the beauty of a brigand. That is how I picture myself Stenka Razin."

"And he is an officer of the guard."

"And with him is a horror of some kind. But how dressed up she is. She has high boots and a sable stole on her shoulders in such a heat. They have probably stolen it from some house during a search."

"I think, girls," Miss Proctor said, "we had better go." But before the young girls had time to rise, the couple was already near the bench and the officer flopped down beside Tania. Quick started up and growled, his hair standing on edge. Olia and Tania moved hastily away.

"Aristocrats!" they caught the mocking words thrown after them. The officer's companion looked at them through her gold lorgnette.

The couple were Osetroff and Jenny. From under his creased cap, worn at the back of his head, a black lock fell over his white forehead. His wide Russian khaki shirt was unfastened and left bare the strong, bull-like throat and white chest. Upon it a precious pendant with a blood-red stone was hanging on a thin gold chain. His trousers were tucked into high boots of yellow leather. He did not wear a sword, but a large, heavy Mauser hung at his side. Owing to the heavy casualties among

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the officers in the regiments of the Guard during the last attacks, Osetroff had been transferred by the chief command into a reserve regiment of the Guard, which the government wished to form of revolutionary officers who were all against the old régime.

Osetroff took out of his pocket a gold cigarette-case with initials in diamonds and lit a cigarette.

"Well, Jenny, so you have broken with Schlossberg?" he asked mockingly, looking at her from under half closed lids.

"Devil take him," Jenny said in a hoarse, tired voice. "He is so vague, so undecided. I love a man who looks like a man, so that when he embraces you he almost crushes you."

"Own up that your ideal is the sailor Dibenko."

"Well, what of it? I don't deny it. He is a fine fellow. He is worth loving. A real giant knight from the Volga. But you also will do."

"Do you think so?"

"And do you love me?"

Osetroff smiled disdainfully.

"Now Jenny, don't be hurt by what I am going to say. I have never loved anyone. I hate everybody, such a hatred rises in me that I would like to destroy everything. But what is it to destroy? It's too little for me. No! What I want is to spoil, spit upon and degrade everything. When I gaze at the sky and see its azure, and the golden clouds sweep over it, I long to spit at it and spit until all its blue vanishes."

"Do you also hate me," Jenny asked.

"You? How shall I explain? I need you just now, you are my illness, my weakness. You see, nothing stops you and nothing frightens you. I want to have you near me at night. I am not strong enough. Since I killed Captain Siversoff in the street in the presence of his wife and child there is no peace for me at night. He is always before me. Then, while we were sacking a house on the Kamenoostrovsky I slashed a policeman's throat and the blood sprinkled me all over. Well, when it is night the thought possesses me—and what if there is a God? You will say that it is my conscience pricking me? Not at all, simply

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

fear and nothing else; and when I am with you, I am not afraid. Last night when I slept at your place I was drunk and I saw a strange dream. It seemed as if Zorka came and told me: 'Do you know that you have buried the victims of the revolution badly on the field of Mars? They lie too close to one another. They struggle at night and bite each other, and you can see it all so distinctly, so clearly.' You know that since then I would like to have their graves dug up and to see for myself. What do you say to it?"

"You dream of Zorka? You can't forget her?"

Osetroff frowned.

"I loved the girl," he said, "if I had cast her off, I wouldn't have minded. But I am enraged that we were parted against my will, and I know who did it—General Sablin. He has concealed her too, God knows where, but I shall find her."

"And if you do, what then?"

"I don't know. If I did not love her I would not be jealous of Gaiduk, and I am jealous of him."

"But the idea was yours?"

"I know, out of friendship. I thought that as now all was in common, so it must be the same with a woman. But it turned out differently."

"You are a bad communist."

"Well, it will come. You see I think that the best thing would be to love a woman, to live with her, and then to kill her. There, that is a feeling that is worth experiencing."

"You are a cynic, Misha!"

"Do you think so? I have thought of being a Napoleon but our people are not the French people. I will tell you how I understand our people. For instance we have miraculous images, like the Kazanskaya Holy Mother. Crowds of people of all sorts worship before it, old men and women, girls, children, rich merchants, all kneel before it. Well if I were to approach it and behave before it in such a way that I myself would feel ashamed, then I am certain, from that moment I should become more sacred in the eyes of the people than the image itself, because I would appear stronger than it is, and if the same

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thing were done with the relics of Seraphim Sarovsky, then for them I would become a Napoleon. Our people are slaves by nature and they must be treated accordingly. They must have a stick over them and strength. The government of the Tsar showed its weakness and that caused its downfall. It was afraid of capital punishment. No! This is the way I would have acted: They revolt! Well, I should have come towards them with a machine-gun and shouted: 'All of you on your knees, hounds!' They would have obeyed blindly, I am positive. Then I would have shot them all dead with my machine-gun. Perhaps the intense scorn I feel for the people explains my hatred for them."

"Where do you get such ideas, Misha?"

Osetroff was silent for a few moments. "Well, to be truthful," he said "not all are my own. I have become intimate with a soldier called Korjikoff. I met him in the Soviet. He, I think, will be the Russian Napoleon. Nothing is sacred for him. And our people, as I understand them, require either a saint or someone who scorns everything. There is nothing in between for them. Well, come along, Jenny, let's go and have a drink."

And they went away, Osetroff singing at the top of his voice a popular song of the revolutionary mob.

V

PAVLIK POLEJAEFF had come back quite unexpectedly from the front and all the young people, Pavlik, Olia, Nika and Tania, were assembled in the evening. Nika had been on guard in the palace.

"It was impossible to speak either to the Emperor or to any one of the family," Nika was saying. "It can't be managed. The soldiers watch them too narrowly. They never leave them alone; when they sit down on a bench immediately soldiers come and sit down beside them, start smoking and try to speak with them or carry on most objectionable conversations among themselves."

"I came to relieve Ensign Gaiduk, a new officer sent here

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

from the Army to inculcate democratic ideas. He is an awful cad, a Lettish peasant. The relief generally takes place during lunch-time and the officers, the new one and the one who is leaving, salute the Emperor and he shakes hands with them. It was also so this time. Gaiduk and I saluted and the Emperor came up towards Gaiduk and stretched out his hand smiling amiably. Gaiduk stepped back and would not shake hands with the Emperor. Olia, you should have seen just then the Emperor's face, what deep sorrow it expressed. He approached Gaiduk, took him by the shoulder and, looking straight into his eyes, asked: 'Why have I deserved such treatment?'

"Gaiduk stepped back again and said: 'I belong to the people. When the people reached out their hands towards you, you pushed them away, now I won't take your hand,' and left the room. I followed him. 'You are a cad, Sir,' I said, overtaking him."

"Thank you, Nika," murmured Tania.

"He stopped and looked at me quietly. I shall never forget his glance. It was as if he did not see me, as if he gazed into space. 'You can't insult me, comrade,' he said. 'Better not try. If I spit at your face, you will die from the insult. If you spit at mine, I shall only wipe it. That is all, so better not compete with me, our forces are too unequal.' Then he turned and joined his men."

Everybody was silent. The twilight of the Petersburg summer night was spreading over the terrace, the perfume of the heliotropes and mignonette grew stronger. Quick, lying near the pink and blue hydrangeas, was watching Nika attentively through his half closed eyes.

"Nika," Tania whispered fixing her blue eyes on him. "Nika, I am a stranger among you, I am not a Polejaeff. I know that you sincerely love my father, my late brother and me. Give me your hands, there, you Olia give me one of yours and the other one to Pavlik, he must give his to Nika and Nika give me yours. 'I swear.' Let this be sacred. We will save him. I don't know how, but we will save him!"

They stood up, moved by all that had taken place. They felt

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as if the oath they had given bound them together sacredly and for ever.

Nika did not take his eyes off Tania. He had been in love with her since the day when he, a ten-year-old boy, dressed up as a marquis, danced a minuet with her, a nine-year-old little marchioness, at a fancy dress-ball, and since these early days his heart had been true to her. His love grew and changed its character with the passing years. The tender feeling of a brother had become a strong, all conquering, first love.

"I have a plan," he said. "I will save the Emperor. But until it is time to speak, no one must know anything about it. Pavlik will you help me?"

Pavlik nodded his head.

"Nika!" said Tania, "God bless you." A small childish hand embraced his neck and pure lips touched his forehead.

"Save Russia," Tania said, and ran to her room.

Nika belonged to the officers of the new generation. He had been promoted after the revolution and after the famous Order No. 1, granting all freedom to the soldiers, had been issued. He had not served under the Double-headed Eagle, he had never been called "Your Honour"; he was addressed either as "Mr. Ensign" or Nicolai Nicolaievitch. He was used to it and it did not shock him. He had a sincere love for the people; he trusted them, and so easily obtained what Sablin had struggled for in vain in his youthful years—the full understanding and the good feeling of his men.

He understood the new discipline and when, after drill or when on guard the regimental kitchen brought them their dinner it did not trouble him to take his turn with the men, carrying his own bowl. He did not mind not being served first or not eating better fare. Indeed, the fact that he was treated like an ordinary soldier, raised him in his own opinion. He liked the rough humour of the men, especially of the young ones, and he considered them as children who could be easily educated. He soon made the soldiers understand how wrong it was to speak roughly or slightingly of the Emperor and he awoke in them a feeling of pity for him and the understanding of their fault.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

But he worked quite alone. The Tsarskoselski Soviet of Soldiers' and Workmen's deputies, or as it was called, the Sovdep, had sent a great number of its officers into the regiment. They gave the soldiers pamphlets and books in which the Emperor was represented most repulsively; they also showed them caricatures of the Tsar's family, and in general they tried to influence the men against the Emperor and his family. Nika soon understood that all the actions of the soldiers were due to the foreign element that was dressed up in officers' uniforms and that it was they who taught them and forced them to take brutal and rough measures. Gaiduk was the most energetic worker in this sense.

Nika soon understood that the Temporary Government was not to the soldiers liking. It had granted many liberties, but it had not released them from the war, had not given them the desired peace and had not allowed them to go home. If the Emperor returned to the throne and gave them the longed for peace, they would stand by him and help him to keep it, but they had been told that he was a traitor and wanted to sign a separate peace that would ruin Russia. From early childhood Nika had passionately loved the Emperor. He had given Tania Sablin his first, youthful love and only waited for the end of the war to propose and then marry, feeling that he would not be rejected. Like all thoroughly good youths, he considered himself unworthy of Tania, thought her faultless, and decided to accomplish an exploit which would make him worthy of her.

The saving of the Emperor would be that exploit. He made up his mind that the influence he had over the soldiers, as well as their credulity and their daring would serve him for this purpose. His plan had long been worked out. He had chosen Sablin's old chauffeur Petroff to be his chief assistant. It was to him that Nika hastened that same evening.

VI

PETROFF belonged to the type of devoted Russian natures who, when they have once given their affection, remain faithful to it. He was a true Russian of the old school, deeply religious, at-

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tached to all the rules of the Orthodox Church and leading an earnest, steady life. He belonged to the peasant class, was a workman in a mechanical factory, quite a simple man and as such had a right to the freedom of speech refused in those days to the "intelligentzia," or the "bourgouisi" as the capitalists were called.

While the real "bourgoui" was afraid of wearing good clothes or showing himself on the street in an expensive coat, Petroff went about in a handsome fur coat and knew that no one would dare to touch him.

After General Sablin's arrest by the soldiers of the Morochensky regiment, Petroff had taken a prominent part in his liberation. It was he who had driven the car that was to convey all the prisoners with the Ensign Gaiduk and the escort to the meeting of the army and who instead of taking them there, brought them to the house occupied by the staff of the front. He then quickly summoned the general on duty and the tables were instantly turned: Sablin, Kozloff and Ermoloff were set free and Gaiduk and the soldiers were arrested. They were to be court-martialled, but the local Sovdep stood up for them and they were liberated, the whole case being classed as an habitual revolutionary excess.

After that it became dangerous for Petroff to remain at the front and Sablin invited him and his wife to live in his flat in Petersburg in Miss Proctor's former rooms. It was his wife, a thin, respectable looking woman, in a lace scarf, which made her look like a Spanish woman, who told Nika that he could find her husband in the chief garage at the Michailovsky riding school.

The doors of the riding-school were open and a long line of cars could be seen in the dimly lit garage. Several armed men stood leisurely before it.

"What do you want, comrade," they asked. Nika had the appearance of a revolutionary officer. His black, budding moustache was cut short, he wore his cap on the nape of his neck, a loosely fitting tunic, breeches and shoes with puttees. He could

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

easily be mistaken for one of Kerensky's or Goutchkoff's aide-de-camps, or an officer of the lorry company.

"Is the chauffeur Petroff here," Nika asked.

The other chauffeur went back and returned a few minutes later followed by Petroff. "Your wife has sent me to fetch you, are you free?"

Petroff had told Nika several times that with money, a powerful motor-car and a few bold, reliable men, nothing could be easier than to save the Emperor. Now in five minutes Nika and Petroff were ascending the stairs of Sablin's flat. Nika took Petroff into Sablin's library and without turning on the light made him sit down opposite himself on the other side of the table. He told his plans, which included the romantic idea of getting the Emperor away to the Hermitages of the Old Believers in the Ural Country. Nika was eloquent about it.

"The Emperor must be saved," Petroff said, speaking at last, "that is evident. The State can't exist without an Emperor. What is a Republic? A lot of Jews who jabber and shout at meetings, that is all. . . . But it can't be done in a car. You said he would have to be taken to the Government of Viatka, or even as far as the Ural? But have you decided where to, exactly?"

"No."

After a silence Petroff resumed:

"We are risking our heads, Your Honour. It must be well done and he himself must wish it. If he wants it to be done—then all will be right. You see we can't get him so far as the place itself in a car. First of all on account of the benzine. Then we have no maps. Who knows the condition of the roads there? And if you stop to inquire then you give yourself away; they will find us and take us by surprise and there will be an end of it. And if, God forbid, the car were to break? And besides we can't take them all. With him it's simple: he can shave his moustache and his beard, no one will know him. The Tsarevitch can be dressed up as a girl if necessary, but she and the Princesses? It is impossible to take them, they are too

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striking. Besides that, we must take them in several cars. And we won't find them."

The old man's words made Nika's heart sink. He was ready to give the whole thing up, and go home, but Petroff thought differently.

"We *must* save him," he said. "Can you answer for your brother, Nicholai Nicholaievitch?"

"Most certainly I can."

"Well then, my old mother lives in a remote village near Novgorod, three versts from the highway. She is a woman of the old times, discreet and honest. She is comfortably off. Thanks to General Sablin I could help her on. She has five rooms in her cottage, but the most important thing is that it is situated in the wilderness of the government of Novgorod. So we must go there. We can reach it in six hours. I will get a powerful car. Send me Pavel Nicolaievitch tomorrow, but make him take off his shoulder-straps; he can practise and then he will be my assistant. You will be carrying an important order; the only thing is that the guard should open the gates and not close them before we have driven away. You understand, it must be done while the Emperor is out walking. We will take him as he is and then—amen. From my mother's, after he has shaved and dressed himself up as a peasant we will go through the woods to the place you spoke of. That is the only way to do it. And now will Your Honour allow me to offer you some tea, in General Sablin's name?"

No time was to be lost. Tsarskoie Selo was full of threatening rumours concerning the decision which had been taken to remove the Tsar and his family to Siberia. The soldiers spoke about it openly. Nika's friends, the Sharp-shooters, partly acquainted with his plan, had promised their help.

"We don't want to be answerable for it," they said, "it must be done so as not to throw any suspicion or responsibility on us. If you are caught then, you must not put the blame on us; it will be no use, for we will deny everything."

Nika never stopped to think about it. He took all the re-

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

sponsibility on himself. He never thought of the consequences it might bring.

Pavlik was driving Petroff's car as his helper for the second week, the gas had been provided and they had even stored a great quantity in Luban. Everything was ready. Only they had not been able to speak to the Emperor. But how could he refuse? Russia's welfare was in question. Pavlik advised using force if necessary. They only waited for the day when the guard they trusted would be on duty and when the gates would be as if accidentally left open. At last this occasion presented itself, but unluckily the Ensign Gaiduk commanded the guard.

The Emperor generally took his walk at eleven o'clock. At that hour they were to enter the park. The weather was uncertain. Heavy clouds swept across the blue sky and a strong wind blew from the sea. The car worked well and steadily. The small red flag which waved over it showed that all who occupied it had acknowledged the revolution. So many cars drove about the town in those days, with young ensigns and soldiers, that Nika did not arouse anybody's suspicion. He was taken for some delegate or member of the Sovdep. Russia's future belonged to the Ensigns, the day was their's and it was they and not the Generals who disposed of the motor-cars. The car's presence did not astonish anyone even when it drove into the park and took the direction of the Alexander Palace. Nika, endeavouring to master his agitation and not to rise in his impatience in his seat, was all attention. The road bordered by willow trees widened, and first an iron grate was seen, then appeared the sentries with rifles and at last the gate-way was before them. It stood wide open. The car put on speed and seemed to fly.

The Grand Duchess and the Tsarevitch were sitting on the lawn before the palace. The Princesses were in simple blouses and wore small hats. The Tsarevitch was in a military shirt with soldier's shoulder-straps, and the St. George's medal was pinned on his breast. He wore a military cap and top-boots. They had just been working in their vegetable-garden. A sol-

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dier in an apron with a spade in his hands stood behind them, he was one of the palace servants. The Emperor sat on a bench near by and the Grand Duchess Olga Nicholaievna was reading to him. They were quite by themselves; Gaiduk could not be seen. The car dashed up. The brakes grated and the suddenness of the halt nearly tossed Nika out of his seat. The Emperor rose and the Tsarevitch followed him. The Emperor was very pale; he had grown thin and his beard was turning grey. He looked questioningly at Nika.

"Your Majesty, get in quickly with the Tsarevitch. We have come to save you," Nika said.

The Emperor shook his head. Nika made the sign of the cross.

"We are Russian people, Your Majesty, and we suffer deeply from your imprisonment; we have come to save you and the Tsarevitch. Please get in, Your Majesty."

The Tsarevitch was looking at Nika with curiosity. The Emperor did not speak.

"You don't trust us, Your Majesty?" Nika said breathlessly. "I swear that we are not liars. We belong to the old nobility, we are your faithful subjects."

"I believe you," the Emperor answered distinctly, his face twitching nervously. "But I will fulfil my duty to the end. Let God's will and my people's be done. The Russian people won't harm me, as I never wished them any harm."

The soldiers and Gaiduk were running from the palace.

"Take hold of them by force," Pavlik screamed. The Tsarevitch began to cry and pressed against the Emperor. Nika was seized by a sudden weakness and indecision; he dared not touch the Emperor. An expression of infinite sadness was in the Tsar's beautiful eyes.

"You won't employ force, it will only make matters worse," the Emperor said gently and turned towards the guard as if seeking their protection.

"All is lost," Pavlik said.

"Get in," Petroff said, "we will escape." Pavlik dragged

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Nika into the car and immediately it lept forward. Shots were heard behind them.

"They are shooting at us," Petroff murmured. "Thy will be done."

The car swung round the lawn; Gaiduk ran across it, shouting something to the sentry at the gate, but it was too late, the car was already dashing along the road.

For a long time no one spoke. Nika could not grasp what had taken place. Pavlik was sitting near him. The wind was blowing in their ears. The road looked white and even. Everything seemed to be flying towards them—the hay-carts, the barking dogs, the villages with the grey cottages, the small gardens, the inns, surrounded by innumerable peasant-carts; their own horn sounded continually, the children along the road-side screamed at them, the springs of their car tossed them up high when they passed over bridges, under which dark streams were flowing, and before them stretched the road, as straight as an arrow, bordered narrowly on both sides by dark firs and pines.

Petroff slackened down and turned round. The road stretched for many versts behind them and nothing was to be seen on it.

"Well," Petroff said, "we have failed. You must hide now. The soldiers will certainly betray you. We will go to my mother and see what can be done."

"And you, Petroff?"

"I will manage all right, no one knows me. Perhaps the car has been recognized. I'll be back tonight; I will store the car and go and lie down. All will be well with me. But the soldiers know you."

The car turned in the darkness and crossing a ditch entered the forest and stopped.

"You, Pavel Nicholaievitch, keep watch for a moment while I lead Nicholai Nicholaievitch to our house."

Nika followed Petroff for over an hour along a narrow forest-path. The prickly firs scratched their faces and the damp soil creaked under their feet. At last a forest-glade, a lake and six cottages facing it appeared before them. The

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moon on its decline rose above the water and was reflected mysteriously in its dark surface. The dogs barked hoarsely, but no light was to be seen. The cottage-windows were all dark.

Petroff knocked for a long time at a cottage-door. At last they heard steps and an old voice asked, what was wanted.

"It is I, mother," Petroff said. "I have brought you lodgers."

The door was opened; a stout, old woman stood in the doorway, lit up by a small, smoking lamp; she was wrapping a grey woolen shawl round her shoulders. She looked at Nika with kind eyes and murmured: "Come in, and be welcome. God bless you. Are you hiding from the soldiers?"

Nika entered the dark room which smelt of fowl.

VII

ON the 30th of July intense agitation reigned in the palace from early morning. The Emperor had been informed of the Temporary Government's decision to send him and his family to Tobolsk for his personal security. His safety had been guaranteed him and he had been promised that all measures would be taken for his and his family's comfort. The majority of the Emperor's suite and servants had voluntarily decided to follow him.

At ten minutes past six in the morning on the 1st of August the train, carrying the Emperor and his family into banishment, slowly left the station. The soldiers of the 2nd and 4th regiments formed its escort.

In the middle of August the Morochnensky Infantry regiment, which was stationed 20 versts from the positions, received the order to go into the trenches to relieve the Pavlinovsky regiment. The order was signed by the Corps Commander, the General who had replaced Sablin.

A meeting was organized to discuss this order. The government, which was not recognized by the Provisional Government, but which was represented everywhere by the Soviet of the Soldiers' and Workmens' deputies and with which all the innumerable committees of the front, the Army, the Divisions, the Corps, the Regiments and the Companies created by Kerensky

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and Goutshkoff, were in continual contact,—that government had decreed that not every order of the chiefs must be blindly obeyed.

The orders were divided into military orders, which the revolutionary discipline required everyone to carry out implicitly, and non-military orders, which, before being complied with, it was not only permitted but even advised to examine, so as to make sure they did not tend to shatter the achievements of the revolution, that they were not meant to bring back the former régime.

The meeting took place the evening preceding the attack, in a small town, half Polish and half Jewish, in the square in front of a Catholic church and of a ruined house of a Polish landowner. A grey crowd of soldiers, numbering fifteen hundred men, crushed together on the square in front of the platform which had been erected at the demand of the local revolutionary leaders in the “happy” days of the March revolution. Leaning on each other’s shoulders, eating and spitting sun-flower seeds, shouting to each other and continually interrupting the orators, the men listened to the officers or the soldiers who in turn sought to persuade them of the necessity of obeying the order.

The meeting was long and noisy. At last a soldier climbed clumsily on the platform. He smiled broadly and uncovering his head shouted:

“My best greetings to you, comrades, and to all our honest people. Yes. But we must go into the front lines out of fellow feeling. They are worn out and we are rested. It is only just and we will go! Not because we are ordered to do so, but out of justice and brotherhood. Let them rest, we will show what stuff we, the Morochnensky soldiers, are made of. We were always good comrades, we won’t fail now!”

He tossed his cap into the air and left the platform. He was loudly cheered and the exclamation of: “That’s right, well said!” followed him.

The crowd began to disperse. It was about supper time.

“What is your opinion, Kazimir Kazimirovitch,” Kozloff asked Wertzinsky, “will they go or not?”

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"All depends on the weather," Wertzinsky answered. "They may go if the weather is fine."

Kozloff looked ten years older after these four last months. His arrest by his own soldiers, the Army's ruin, had affected him deeply.

The morning when they were to take the field was foggy and grey. A drizzling rain was falling; nevertheless the regiment, talking and screaming, left the village noisily. There was a river, ten versts from the night's lodging and half way from the lines; Cossacks sentries guarded the bridges that were thrown over it. The regiment was to halt there.

The men were drawing near in a grey, noisy crowd. They advanced slowly and gloomily, no songs were heard. They did not like singing the old songs, they were ashamed of them and they knew too few new ones.

"Halt!" sounded the command, when the leading company had reached the river. "Halt, halt!" was repeated in all the sixteen companies and, without waiting for the permission to do so, the men sat down wherever they fancied and lit their cigarettes.

Scarcely were they seated, when a sailor appeared in their midst; his cap was pushed to the back of his head, his shirt left his neck and chest bare. He had come from the neighbouring railway-station. He was young, impudent looking and alert. He talked to one group of soldiers, then to another, and a third; suddenly single soldiers began to leave the regiment and ran towards the bridge. Once there, they took off their cartridge-pouches, pulled the cartridges out and flung them into the water. Separate shots sounded: the soldiers were firing into the air. This continued for several minutes, then the entire regiment was seized by madness: incessant, disorderly firing sounded all over the stately oak-forest which sloped towards the river.

The men dragged out the cartridge-boxes, snatched the machine-gun belts and threw them into the water. Screams of: "Down with the war!" were heard from all sides amid the shooting. To the right several hundred voices were singing the melody of the Marseillaise roughly and coarsely. New

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voices joined them continually. The firing had spread all over the regiment. The shots, repeated by the echo in the forest, seemed louder. First one and then a second machine-gun started shooting in the forest, and the fierce, wild Marseillaise was carried along the river, at times louder, then fainter, exciting and carrying the men away. Only a few knew the words, and the song sung without them was but a savage and fierce howl.

"Down with the war. Down with the officers! Arrest them."

When the first shots had been fired Kozloff mounted and rode towards the soldiers.

"You have gone mad," he shouted. "Who are you? Germans? Germans? Joined up with them? Stop shooting! Officers, to your posts!"

Pale faces were all around. The men didn't understand what had taken place. Their eyes were terrible. Soldiers, not belonging to the regiment, were running from the village carrying red flags.

"Grab the Commander!" someone shouted, and Jelieskin, his orderly, caught hold of the bridle of Kozloff's horse. The crowd surrounded him. He was about to draw his revolver, but his intention was guessed. One of the soldiers caught hold of the holster, clung to it and tore it off together with the weapon. The shooting and singing had ceased. The men had gathered into one heavily breathing crowd. All around were wild, insane eyes.

"Drag him along, drag him along!" Someone was ordering in the crowd. Rough hands snatched Kozloff by the leg, pulled him off his trembling horse and hauled him towards the forest. Jelieskin never left Kozloff's side. He did not touch him and stared at him dully, with a pale, horrified face.

"Brothers, what are you doing?" Kozloff exclaimed, with tears in his voice. "I have a wife and children."

"Tie him to a tree. There, so. To this oak. Twist his hands back firmly."

TO RED FLAG

"What are you going to do with me? Why?" Kozloff exclaimed.

"Haven't you drunk enough of our blood?"

The men crushed together, trod on each other's feet, stumbled, fell, got up again and pushed on further, panting heavily.

"Where is the rope?" someone asked in a business-like tone.

"Look in the cart, I think it was there."

"Shall we torture him first or finish him off at once?" asked a young fellow, bareheaded with dishevelled hair.

A solitary shot was heard.

"The sailor has settled with the Ensign," someone said close to Kozloff. "He shot him with his revolver."

"Shall we begin?" The men were trembling and had lost all human aspect. They spoke mechanically and in broken sentences. None of them understood what they said and what they did.

"We must strip him first."

"No, we can finish him off so."

"No, he must certainly be undressed. Why should his tunic be lost, it is brand-new."

Kozloff's tunic was pulled off.

"Wait, comrades, and the boots."

"You are damned sharp! You imagine they'll be yours."

"They are first-class. Let us toss for them. Haul them off, I tell you."

Without stopping Kozloff's boots were dragged off. He no longer walked himself, the men shoved him towards the forest.

"No, take his trousers off."

"His trousers? And what for?"

"What for? And his watch? And his money?"

Kozloff, half naked, bare-footed, was tied to the trunk of a tree. He looked at the men with wide-open eyes, full of suffering.

Jelieskin stood before him, gazing at him with pity or bewilderment.

"Well, shall we try him?" he asked hesitatingly, addressing himself to the crowd.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"And who preached the war? Eh? To the victorious end, eh?" voices were heard saying.

"Shall we shoot him?"

"It is not sufficient to shoot him!"

"Wait a bit, comrades. How were we taught?" exclaimed a young dishevelled soldier, placing himself in fencing position a step and a half from Kozloff.

"Thrust forward and butt to the rear!" commanded one of the men laughing.

A terrible, sharp pain contracted Kozloff's body. The bayonet had passed through his stomach and entered the tree. The soldier turned the rifle round fiercely and with the butt-end hit Kozloff in the face. The bones cracked. The nose, the mouth were one bloody spot, out of which the eyes, which were yet alive and had half dropped out of their sockets, gazed in horror and suffering. Kozloff began to sink to the ground with an agonized groan.

"Finish him off," someone shouted. Several shots were fired at Kozloff's shapeless, bloody face and he was silent.

"Now, comrades, hurry along into the village. Ours are there already. The fun has begun."

They all rushed away.

"Kill the Jews," someone shouted in the crowd. The soldiers were dragging Jewish women, girls and youths into the wood. An invisible force was drawing the men towards the spot where innocent blood had been shed, where, tied to an oak, bending forward, was the motionless, terrible Kozloff, where lay the dead bodies of the Captain, of the Ensign and of the six young officers, with their shoulder-straps torn off, with their skulls smashed by the shots.

There, among the dead bodies, the soldiers in groups of fifteen to twenty men were swarming and bustling, accomplishing their evil deed. From there came groans of pain, hysterical laughter, women's sobs, prayers for mercy, coarse laughter and fierce jokes. The beasts were feasting and revelling over their prey.

Beyond the bridge, crouching near the water edge, sat Wert-

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zinsky. He rested his head on his hand and gazed dully at the dark, flowing river, repeating mechanically the words of the Marseillaise. Although the oak-grove on the other side was quiet and peaceful, Wertzinsky thought he still heard the moans of the martyred officers, Kozloff's agonized death-groans and the cries of the miserable women. He thought he could distinguish their white, motionless bodies lying on the grass between the trees.

"What is it? What is it?" he murmured. "It is not a revolution, but a mutiny, a Russian mutiny; as Pushkin had already said: 'The Russian mutiny is meaningless and merciless.' And this is only the beginning."

"Your Honour," he heard a voice speaking over him. Standing upright before him, saluting him, was the very soldier who had killed Kozloff.

Wertzinsky looked at him.

"The regiment begs Your Honour to lead it to the position."

Wertzinsky sighed and rising obediently ascended the slope leading to the road, where, in the falling dusk, the companies stood silent and in full order.

He thrust his hands deep into his trousers' pockets and bending his head marched before the regiment.

The Morochenensky regiment reached the positions after ten o'clock of the evening. Two battalions were to stay in the dug-outs in the forest and two were to occupy the trenches.

Wertzinsky was received by the Commander of the Pavlinovsky regiment, a young officer of the General Staff, and by the chairman of the soldiers' committee, an educated intelligent Jew, a young fellow with a pale, delicate face and large prominent eyes and sensual lips. He wore a coat without shoulder-straps and did not wait for Wertzinsky to shake hands with him, but stretched his hand out first. A petroleum lamp was burning in the dug-out, which was silent as a grave and smelt strongly of earth and cold tobacco smoke.

"Why so late, comrade!" asked the officer of the General Staff. "We heard a fierce firing going on in the rear and we thought the German aeroplanes had attacked you."

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

Wertzinsky before answering threw an expressive glance at the chairman of the committee.

"You may speak before the comrade Zonnenfeld. I have no mysteries and secrets from the soldiers. We have pledged ourselves to serve in full brotherhood under the red banners of the revolution," the Commander of the regiment said.

"The fact is," Wertzinsky said, "that although we have come to relieve you I don't know whether you will accept us. We have come without cartridges, without the Commander of the regiment and almost without officers."

"And why it is so?" the Commander of the Pavlinovsky regiment asked.

"Some of the cartridges have been thrown into the river, others have been fired off into the air; Colonel Kozloff, Captain Pushkin, Lieutenant Zveginetsky and six officers have been killed by the men; about forty officers have run away and I can't tell you exactly who is here and who is missing."

"That was to be expected," Zonnenfeld said and gazed fixedly at Wertzinsky.

"Yes," the Commander of the Pavlinovsky regiment said, "Kozloff tried the men's patience. He was too much for the old customs. He did not understand the new revolutionary soldier and he has paid for it. God bless his soul. Naturally one feels sorry for him, but he would always have it his own way and he would not admit the soldiers' free will."

"That is not all the men have done," Wertzinsky said bitterly. "Having committed this murder they rushed into the small town of Dalin and sacked it. I don't exactly know what happened there, but the women were being tormented till the evening and their bodies are lying under the bridge in the wood."

"How disgraceful!" Zonnenfeld exclaimed. "Why did you not stop them?"

"I should like to have seen you stopping them!" said Wertzinsky.

"You should have used your arms against them."

"I have never used arms against anyone; such are my convictions."

TO RED FLAG

"Plehanoff's tactic," Zonnenfeld said mockingly.

"I shall not begin a dispute on principles with you, comrade—you have two standards: one for the officers, the other for Jews and Jewish women. You are a Bolshevik, a follower of Lenin, blood does not repel you. And for me, comrade, any murder is equally disgusting and monstrous, so let us stop this conversation."

"The first is an execution, maybe a cruel and an unjust one, but execution is the vengeance of the people. The second is a senseless, savage murder, Russian bestiality," Zonnenfeld retorted hotly.

"Stop, comrade," the Commander said. "Let us admit that capital punishment will be recognized as necessary in view of the violence inflicted on the population. It is indispensable for us, Captain, to establish who is responsible for it all."

"I think it is utterly impossible to do so—it was the work of a whole crowd. Out of a thousand five hundred men I should say that only five hundred kept away."

"Mr. Colonel," Zonnenfeld said, "I think that the right thing to do would be to give the whole case over to the committee of the Army and to the political commissar; he will know how to deal with it and how to judge it not from the judicial point of view, but from the revolutionary standard. The men guilty of the 'pogrom' must be severely punished, but it is impossible to have a thousand men shot or even tried. It is necessary to separate the instigators and the chief participants and the committee of the regiment will establish this."

"I shall not discuss or examine this case," Wertzinsky said in a tired voice. "I have another question to ask: the men are preparing to go into the trenches, but they have no cartridges. They have no officers."

"I'll help you; I will give you half of my cartridges, but really it is of no importance," said the Commander of the regiment. "We are no longer at war with the Germans, neither we nor they do any shooting. Each day conversations and truck are carried on between the front lines. Yesterday my men exchanged a machine-gun for a bottle of rum, and it was such

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horrid stuff. I reported to the Staff. Our honourable Abraham Petrovitch gave order to note the machine-gun as lost in fighting. There are many who speak Russian among the Germans, so our men talk with them about making peace. It is not a front, but an idyl. To my knowledge there is but one company against our regiment; they have ceased counting with us and they do not think of attacking us. And the fact of our having or not having cartridges makes no difference, the men having settled definitely that they would fight no more."

When Wertzinsky was left alone he threw himself down in his overcoat on the dirty hay-sack, which he had inherited from the Pavlinovsky regiment, and shut his eyes. He groaned and turned to the wall. He was persecuted by the vision of a little girl. He had seen her when he was running from the oak-forest towards the bridge. She was a child of twelve, with long, golden-brown hair, with large black eyes, shaded by long lashes. She looked strong and healthy. Four soldiers were carrying her. Her red petticoats were turned up and showed her small feet and her legs in black stockings. She was screaming and moaning and her open lips uncovered her pretty even, white teeth. An old man and an old woman were running after them. They had forgotten everything in their wild grief, they scolded and beat the soldiers' backs with their bony, knotted fists and their thin, clinging fingers, as the bones of a skeleton, clung to the men's shirts. "Did these people come from palaces? And who were the executioners?"

Wertzinsky sat up on his bed. All his body was aching and shook and shivered with ague.

"It is because I have not taken off these damned rattles." He took off his ammunition belt, his overcoat, his clothes and his boots, and remained in his underwear.

The light of a clear dawn penetrated the narrow windows and the open door. The place was full of soldiers and they could be seen crowding on the steps outside in the bluish, gray light. They were pale and brought with them the heavy odour of sweat and of exhausted human beings. They were thrusting some kind of notes at Wertzinsky saying:

TO RED FLAG

"Mr. Captain, here are the names of the instigators from all the companies. The second company is to blame. We, honour bright, are innocent. We wanted to deliver the officers and we know nothing about the Jews, we even ran away. And here are the boots, wear them, Mr. Captain, they are strong and new; and don't think we took a thing, oh, dear no! We are sending the fellows to bury them, that is the victims of this revolution and we want to send for the priest. We will swear on our honour that we are perfectly innocent, in spirit and in body! As before the Almighty. It is only the second company, and the sailor, God knows where he came from."

Wertzinsky looked at them and the senseless smile of a mad-man contorted his clean-shaven mouth.

"Send everything to the division Headquarters. I don't know anything," he said.

"Very well, Mr. Captain," the men answered obediently and left the dug-out. The slanting rays of the festive summer-sun and the joyful twitter of the forest birds penetrated into the dug-out.

Wertzinsky fell on his couch and dropped into a sound, dreamless sleep. . . .

VIII

It was decided in the corps Headquarters that the murder of the Commander of the regiment as well as that of the officers and the sacking of the small town of Dalin should be submitted not to the Court of Inquiry for important cases, but to the army committees; it was decided also to send the commissar of the army with a Cossack regiment and machine-guns for the capture of the criminals. This case was neither exceptional nor the only one of its kind. Excesses of the same nature had occurred in different places and practice had shown that the Court of Inquiry remained without results. Instructions had been received from the War minister regarding such cases. It was advised to proceed with utmost caution, so as not to irritate the soldiers.

The "Praporshtchik" Knoop was the Commissar of the army.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

The revolutionary wave had carried him first to the Soviet of Soldiers' and Workmen's deputies as a delegate of the regiment, then he had joined the Executive Committee of this Soviet, known as the "Ispolkom," and after the revolution in April in which he had played a leading part directing the soldiers he had been sent as Commissar to the Army. The same Knoop who had struggled against discipline and order in the Reserve battalion and against Captain Savelieff and who had sung chansonnettes at Countess Paltoff's evening party was now a person whose importance equaled that of the Commander of the Army. He disposed of the motor-cars; if he had no regular aide-de-camps, there were always obliging members of the local Sovdep and of the Committee of the Army only too eager to serve one of their own people. Some of the Corps Commanders, the Commanders of the Division, the Commanders of the Regiments ignored him, others flattered him, seeking his help and hoping to restore the regiments with his assistance. There were ample reasons to turn a head much steadier than Knoop's. He became most important; he dressed at the best Petrograd tailors, ordered himself an elegant tunic, breeches and copied in manners and speech his idol—Kerensky.

When the bloody event which had taken place in the Morochnensky regiment became known to the Staff of the Army, Knoop came to the meeting of the local Sovdep, made a fiery report and obtained the assurance of the local Sovdep's support as well as its promise to confirm all his decisions. The corps Headquarters had been informed by telegraph of his arrival and the best car of the garage of the Army was put at his disposal. It was decided to meet him as if he were the Commander of the Army.

The car, driven by two educated looking youths, drove up smartly and stopped. Knoop threw off his coat carelessly, in a manner studied and copied from the old Generals. He then turned towards the entrance. The officer on duty reported.

"How do you do, General?" Knoop said reaching out his big, well-kept hand, with its polished nails. "I think we will start at once. Are the men assembled?"

TO RED FLAG

"The soldiers are on the bivouac. The battalions which occupied the lines have refused to be relieved. The 806th regiment is in the reserve. They have confessed. All the names of the instigators have been taken down and I don't doubt that they will be given up."

Knoop, who had been invited to take the place at the head of the table, sat in a negligent attitude, drinking tea and eating the sandwiches which had been prepared for him.

"You need not go," he said patronizingly to the Corps Commander. "It is too much honour for these scoundrels. We will go with the Division Commander. Are the Cossacks ready?"

"The bivouac is surrounded and the machine-guns are placed," said the Commander of the Cossack regiment, gloomily, looking at Knoop with unconcealed hatred.

"Then let us start," Knoop said rising.

The mounted Cossacks surrounded his car; and escorted by them he drove towards the wood. It was a hot August day. Rosy-white, fluffy clouds floated on the blue sky and it seemed clear and high. The road was bordered with slender red-yellow pines, under which pink heather was withering and the strong perfume of resin, moss, pines and juniper was poisoned at times by the odour of decaying bodies of dead horses. Barbed wire and the crumbling trenches of the reserve which had not been repaired for a long time, became visible. The car entered a forest-glade where several low huts were scattered about. Two battalions were standing in lines. The men were unarmed. All around in the forest crowded soldiers of the 806th regiment; they had come to watch the execution. Mounted Cossacks with drawn swords were dispersed on the outskirts of the forest. The Sotnia of the reserve, also on horseback, stood facing the battalion.

The command of "attention" was given and the battalions were quiet. Dead silence reigned in the glade. Knoop got out of the car, which drove away puffing and creaking. He advanced towards the 1st battalion escorted by the Cossacks and by a small suite, carrying his head high, walking awkwardly

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with careless steps over the moss and the heather. Tchoutchkin, Kozloff's Lieutenant-Colonel, who having been in the baggage train had had the good fortune to escape the fate of the other officers, was now in command of the regiment and had come to meet his chiefs. He was a man of fifty, a good soldier, whose severe face clearly expressed that he was a man of duty.

Knoop stopped at a distance of five steps from the battalion. He clenched his fists and shouted:

"Scoundrels! did you imagine that freedom has been given you, so that you might kill, plunder and commit deeds of violence? We don't establish an English or German régime, but a Democratic Republic in the full sense of the term. You are the free-est soldiers of the world! And how did you use the freedom you had been given?"

"You have killed faithful servants of the Republic and you have degraded yourselves to plunderings. You, You. . . . You are not free soldiers—citizens, but mutinous slaves! And you will be dealt with as such. I am a member of the Executive Committee of the Soldiers' and Workmen's deputies and I demand," he shrieked, "I demand that you deliver me immediately the scoundrels who instigated you to rebel."

Knoop stopped speaking. No one stirred, not one single voice was lifted in the battalion.

"Have the instigators been delivered?" the Division Commander asked addressing himself to Tchoutchkin.

"Yes, Your Excellency," the Colonel said.

"Have them called," Knoop said.

Tchoutchkin didn't move, as if it didn't concern him.

"Call them out, Colonel," the Division Commander said.

Tchoutchkin stepped forward in front of Knoop and began calling out loudly and distinctly from memory the soldiers' names.

Very slowly and reluctantly the soldiers left the ranks of the 2nd company and formed a line in front of the battalion. They were young fellows of unmilitary appearance, for the most part not peasants, but towns-people. They were eighteen in number.

"And besides these," Tchoutchkin said, "there are two more,

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Krotoff and Lunchakoff, who are on the position. They have been sent for."

"Have these blackguards arrested!" Knoop shouted fiercely.

"Comrades! What is all this?" screamed one of the instigators.

"We shan't give them up!" exclaimed several voices in the battalion and hundreds of clenched fists were lifted overhead, but no one moved from his place.

"Cossacks!" the Division Commander said.

The mounted "sotnia" rode up to the battalion, all the hands were lowered and silence reigned once more.

"Take them in charge," Knoop said to the Cossack officer.

The officer glanced at him gloomily, surrounded the men who had been called out with his Cossacks and led them away.

It was so intensely silent in the forest that one could hear on the heather the rustle of the retreating men's steps. Knoop felt like Gulliver in the land of Lilliputians.

"Dismiss the battalion," he said to the Division Commander softly, "I will speak separately with the men."

"Dismiss the men," the Division Commander said to Tchoutchkin.

"It is better not to do so, Your Excellency," said Tchoutchkin, looking at the men anxiously.

"It is nothing; dismiss them. I know what I am doing," Knoop said.

"Dismissed!" commanded Tchoutchkin.

The two grey squares of the battalion columns dispersed and small groups of men covered the glade. Some surrounded the Cossacks and began talking to them, others walked in crowds behind Knoop. He stopped near a big fir-tree and standing on its roots, looked down at the mob of soldiers facing him. He imagined himself to be a new Christ, a preacher of a new religion, surrounded by the people, thirsting for his vivifying words.

"That fellow's speech was not a democratic one," said a Cossack. "Scoundrels! we have heard enough of that during the old régime."

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The Cossack officers reported these speeches to their Commander; he assembled his regiment and went to find Knoop.

"I would advise you to go away," he said, "you have done your duty, you have taken the instigators, and all these speeches will only make matters worse."

Knoop frowned scornfully.

"Oh," he said, "you don't understand a soldier's soul. It is absolutely necessary to dispel all this darkness; the soldier must be convinced that he is wrong."

The Colonel ordered the chauffeurs to bring up the car. At the same time an officer, pale and agitated, approached Knoop and said, looking at him, but addressing himself to the Division Commander:

"Your Excellency, the battalions which occupied the position have left it and are advancing in lines and in battle formation. They have opened fire. I ordered the Cossack machine-gunners to shoot at them. They have refused to obey."

"How? They have left the position?" Knoop exclaimed wrathfully. "That is a crime. I will show these villains what it is to uncover the front. Where is the position, Colonel? Take me there."

"You had better not go," exclaimed the Commander of the Cossack regiment.

"I will go," Knoop said stubbornly. "It is my duty to bring these scoundrels back to their senses."

He got into the car with the Division Commander.

The car moved, when a piercing voice rose above all the other noises:

"To your arms!"

Armed men came rushing out of the dug-outs. They surrounded the glade closely and blocked all the passages. The anti-aeroplane gun boomed as a call to rebellion and immediately the disorderly firing of over three thousand rifles echoed in the forest. The rifles were fired into the air. The entire mass of the Cossack regiment rushed forward and, drawing the officers after it, galloped towards the road passing between the barbed wire of the position of the reserve. The road was narrow and

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the dazed Cossacks dashed straight at the barbed wire; the horses fell entangled between the piles, the bullets buzzed over them, breaking the branches of the trees and increasing the panic. But not all discharged their rifles into the air. Some of the men shot at the car in which Knoop and the Division Commander were sitting, as well as at the group of horsemen among whom were the Commander of the Cossack regiment and his aide. The Cossack orderlies had left them. The car which was about to turn onto the road leading to the position was stopped by the chauffeurs who jumped out and ran towards the huts and hid behind them. Knoop and the Division Commander jumped out after them. The Division Commander gripped the Commander of the Cossack regiment's stirrup and holding on ran beside him after the Cossacks. Knoop rushed towards the hut. But the soldiers who had been standing before it ran in first and closed the door from inside. Knoop remained standing on the small porch. He was pale. His eyes expressed the fear of a tracked animal. A soldier with the flat, broad face and the hands of a monkey, dealt him a blow on the head with the butt-end of his gun and Knoop fell face downwards near the door. Several shots fired at the back of his head finished him off. The soldiers were accomplishing everything silently, gravely, in a business-like way. Knoop remained lying on the porch.

The Commander of the regiment, Tchoutchkin, had hidden in a dark corner of the hut. The soldiers rushed in after him.

"Here he is," shouted a fine-looking fellow with the Cross of St. George. "Haul him out, comrades."

The Colonel, grey-haired, with a dishevelled beard, in a tunic with shoulder-straps, with a sword and a revolver, dropped most unexpectedly on his knees.

"Mercy, brothers," he implored, in a sobbing voice. "Have pity, I'm not in fault. I have always been on your side."

"Drag him out," came the fierce order given by the same soldier who had just killed Knoop.

Rough hands grabbed Tchoutchkin and hauled him to the door.

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"Brothers," he begged, "in Christ's name have mercy on me."

"Hark whom he has remembered. Christ!" said a soldier with a pale, idiotic face, a mere lad. "And do you believe He really was Christ? Eh?"

"Let us crucify him as Christ was crucified. Then he will soon know," another soldier suggested.

"We haven't any nails," remarked one of the men who was pushing Tchoutchkin along.

"He does look like Christ, only his beard is grey. Well, he is an old Christ."

"Let us crucify him here, to this wall."

A small chapel had been erected in the forest out of fresh pine trunks. Formerly mass had been celebrated in it by the priest on duty. Before the revolution soldiers had decorated it with carvings, and ikons, painted by officers, were hanging in it. It was here that the men brought Tchoutchkin.

"Brothers," he implored, "you are soldiers and not murderers. We have fought together."

"Well, shall we crucify him?" asked a tall soldier smilingly, holding Tchoutchkin to the wall. "It's the right place."

"Haven't you heard, that we have no nails large enough?"

"What do we need nails for?" drawled the soldier who had killed Knoop. "Bayonets are just as good as nails. Pull his hands up. Lift him!"

A bayonet was thrust into the open palm and then torn off the rifle. The fingers instinctively closed and caught hold of the bayonet. A second bayonet pierced his left hand and he half hung down, supported by a strong, bearded soldier of the reserve. The man looked at him with grave, thoughtful, gentle eyes; he had looked in the same way at the oxen and the sheep which were brought to be slaughtered.

The third bayonet pierced Tchoutchkin's breast right in the middle and penetrated deep into the planks.

"One of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water," muttered Tchoutchkin hoarsely, but distinctly.

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"Will you be silent, old dog," the soldier who had killed Knoop screamed passionately.

Tchoutchkin lifted his head which had dropped onto his breast and looked straight into the man's eyes, murmuring: "Amen, amen, amen."

There was something in the fading gaze of the old Colonel which made the soldier, who was pale enough already, turn still paler, he caught hold of his rifle and shot straight at Tchoutchkin's temple. The Colonel's legs shuddered helplessly and then he was motionless. A sudden, wild terror seized the soldiers who had crucified him and they all rushed away panic-stricken from the place of execution. The firing had ceased. The cartridges were nearly all out. The excitement and the furious intoxication had given place to a feeling of apathy, and the people who had just reached the utmost limits of bestiality and audacity felt intense horror seize their souls and their hearts stopped beating in the agony of their fear. Without entering the dug-outs they went straight into the trenches in disorderly crowds hoping to find peace and justification in the enemy's presence. The German sentries stood uncovered and watched the strange events that were taking place on the Russian side.

Meanwhile the Cossacks who were escorting the prisoners and who already had covered a distance of eight versts dispersed, and the prisoners also escaped.

About eleven o'clock the authorities drove up to Headquarters in three large cars. They were members of the local Sovdep. Korjikoff, who was at their head, had been sent from the Petersburg Soviet of Soldiers' and Workmen's deputies. Seven men were with him. Two Jews, one of them a former student, now a soldier, called Gommel, the other a watch-maker—Zilberfandt; two soldiers, Losseff and Bealo, both of them young, who had finished the primary school; Lomoff, a soldier belonging to the peasant class, dull and obstinate, Pavlutzky, a young hair-dresser and Lihatcheff, a chemist's apprentice. Lomoff alone was over thirty, all the others were under twenty-one. They seated themselves before a table with grave faces trying to look important, got out their books and started ques-

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tioning the General in command of the Corps and his chief of the Staff and the officers who had witnessed Knoop's murder and who had run away from the regiment.

Korjikoff sat at the head of the table gazing silently at everyone with intelligent, angry eyes. Gommel was in charge of the inquiry. His amiability was exaggerated.

"I presume, comrade Victor," he said, addressing Korjikoff, "that we need not continue our inquiry. Everything is perfectly clear: The events were caused by the inertness of the authorities. The officers, instead of stopping the soldiers and putting an end to the excesses, fled from them like cowards. Shall we proceed to the place where the events happened?"

Korjikoff nodded his head.

"And I should advise you, sirs," he said, turning to the officers, who stood, visibly depressed, in the large room, "to join your regiments at once and to do your utmost to gain the men's confidence. I consider that it is you who are chiefly to blame in this painful event."

A lieutenant, an officer of pre-revolutionary days, with a pale face and brilliant eyes, stepped forward and said firmly:

"You are wrong! We did all we could and our tortured and killed comrades are a proof that it was so. Discipline must be restored, you must establish respect. . . ."

Korjikoff interrupted him.

"But you have not yet been killed?" he said ironically, "so you have not fulfilled your duty to the end. We can't compel the men to respect you. You must gain their respect."

Korjikoff left the cottage accompanied by the other members of the Sovdep.

The forest near the dug-outs of the reserve was empty. The members of the Sovdep got out and saw the body of Knoop. Korjikoff looked with indifference at the murdered man's face.

"Well, he can thank himself for it," he said speaking to himself.

Korjikoff left the group which was standing devoutly before the body and putting his hands behind his back walked up and down.

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Suddenly a wild, strange sound attracted his attention.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" someone was laughing roughly and angrily.
"Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Korjikoff went in the direction of the laughter. The fir-trees and pines stood farther apart, forming a small glade, a chapel made of planks was standing on it. It was decorated with withered garlands of fir-trees and mistletoe. Images of our Saviours, of the Holy Virgin, of St. Nicholas and of two Angels were placed in special niches.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" came from the interior of the chapel. Korjikoff entered it.

A man of strange appearance stood looking at the back-wall of the chapel, laughing wildly like a mad-man. He was dressed in a loose great-coat with shoulder-straps which had once been golden; he wore no cap, his light hair, turning grey, was dishevelled and he had a clean-shaven, wrinkled face.

The body of an officer was hanging on the wall of the chapel; it was crucified with outstretched arms, fixed with bayonets to the wall; the chest was also pierced through with bayonets, and the head was smashed and drooped down.

"Comrade!" the man exclaimed choking with laughter. "Look here, comrade, how cleverly our men have done it. A people which is said to have God ever living in their souls. . . . They have crucified Colonel Tchoutchkin like Christ! . . . He is surely in God's Kingdom by now! . . . Holy Russia! . . . With its priests, its miraculous images, its sacred relics! . . . And it crucifies like Christ. . . . Do you grasp, comrade, the strength of this allegory? . . . The Tsar is no more, and God exists no longer. Amen. There is an end to it. And who crucified Christ? The Jews? And Tchoutchkin, who crucified him? . . . Not the Jews? . . . No. The Orthodox, Christ-loving Army? That is fine! In the sixth month of the revolution! And mind you, it is a bloodless one. What will happen now? You ask what? Behold this fall, comrade. The precipice is so deep, that it seems impossible to fall any deeper. And what if 'Per aspera ad astra!' Towards what stars shall we jump out of such a precipice! This is the Russian revolu-

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tion! Colonel Misha Tchoutchkin has been crucified like Christ! Misha! You'll be a saint. The priests, if they are not all exterminated, will canonize you. Saint Father Michael, implore God for us! . . . Ha! . . . Ha! . . . Ha! . . . Isn't it a fine allegory?"

"You please me," said Korjikoff, looking intently at Wertzinsky. "What is your name?"

"My name! Allow me to introduce myself," said the man saluting.

"Wertzinsky, Kazimir son of Kazimir, Captain and student of Latin. Revolutionary and follower of Plehanoff."

IX

AFTER Sablin's arrest by the soldiers and his liberation, he went to Petersburg firmly determined to have his resignation accepted. He found there that hopes centered in Kerensky. He was trusted, people sided with him, thinking that he would be the link between the Provisional Government, formed of the middle-classes, and the Soviet of Soldiers' and Workmen's deputies.

Sablin's resignation was not accepted. An order of the Minister of War Kerensky had just been issued forbidding the senior Commanders to resign. In vain Sablin tried to prove how impossible it was for him to return to the corps where he had been insulted by the soldiers. They told him in the staff that he need not return, that he would be given another corps. Everything that was happening was so comprehensible, the army would get over the disease it was suffering from. They gave him as an example the French revolutionary army, which had started by the "sansculottism" and had developed into Napoleon's heroes who had conquered Europe. They flattered Sablin. "We need Murats," they told him. "But where is Napoleon?" he asked them. Some said that a Napoleon would appear, others were mysteriously silent and pointed at Kerensky's portrait hanging everywhere, some in profile, some en face, but the majority only waved their hands hopelessly at Sablin. The staffs had lost their important and grave aspect too suddenly, the street had invaded them also.

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Sablin saw a battalion of a regiment of the guard leave for the front. It marched towards the Nicholas station along the Zagorodni Prospect to the sounds of the popular march "Under the Double-headed Eagle." A big red silk flag waved over it. The following watch-words were worked on it in white silk, on one side: "The war to a victorious end in full harmony with the Allies," and on the other: "Long live the Temporary Government." The battalions marched briskly, the officers keeping in the ranks. He also met a large unit, which was either going to the station or to take part in some kind of demonstration. Big red flags waved over it and on them stood in black letters: "Down with the Temporary Government," "Hail to the Soviet of Soldiers' and Workmen's deputies," "Peace to the cottages and war to the palaces." A large crowd of women followed singing the Marseillaise.

The staffs and departments were suddenly invaded by young girls with typewriters and the formerly severe and quiet chanceries and offices were filled with the noise of Remingtons.

"What can such a number of girls find to write in your offices?" inquired Sablin of an officer of the staff whom he knew.

"God alone knows!" he answered, "where a half-literate clerk managed to get things done before, nowadays at least ten girls are employed and you can never get satisfaction."

Kerensky was forming women's battalions and the lovers of the fair sex were greatly attracted by them, concealing their true feelings under the beautiful watch-words of women's rights. Sablin watched all that was taking place and was no longer revolted at the unnecessary surrender of the Lessischensky place-d'armes, at his own arrest, at the insults he had endured. He no longer wondered at the failure of the advance and at the army's dishonour. It could not have been different, because all the principles of military science had been overthrown.

The evenings passed at Varia Martoff's with the young people and their passionate disputes often rose in Sablin's mind. They had attained their aim. The military salute, the holiness of the banners, the exactness in the service of the guard, the

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drilling, the education—everything had been ruined; liberty and freedom were in all things.

The armies were destroyed and were replaced by a crowd. After having observed all that was happening Sablin understood that there could be no question of resignation, as there also was no service. Only one other thing could be done and that was to go abroad, but Sablin could not decide to take such a step—he considered it an act of desertion.

Sablin went to see Oblienissimoff. He found him packing his things. The apartment he occupied in his own house was nearly empty. The costly pieces of furniture, of Boule and inlaid work which Oblienissimoff had collected all his life were no longer there.

“Ah, Sasha,” Oblienissimoff shouted opening his arms. “How do you do? What has brought you to our Bedlam?”

“Bedlam?” Sablin said. “It is not long since you drove about in cars, delivering speeches to the crowd, congratulating them with the great bloodless revolution.”

The uncle looked slyly at his nephew and began laughing loudly.

“Was it a long time ago? Look, I have shaved my beard and have cut off my moustache. I have turned into an actor from the Russian ‘barin’ I was. I was a fool, Sasha, a complete fool. No, my dear friend, nothing will tempt me back again into our ‘matoushka’ * Russia. Do you remember my beaver coat? Eh? The ‘pride and the beauty of the revolution’—the sailors took it. Yes. I had been driving with them about town in a lorry delivering speeches. It was in the days when we believed we were reaching heavenwards; when we got home they told me: ‘And now, comrade, take off your coat.’ ‘How so?’ said I, ‘why must I take it off?’ ‘Because,’ answered they, ‘you have worn it long enough.’ And they took it off.”

“Where are you going, uncle?” Sablin asked.

“Abroad, Sasha. I have realized all my property. My estate has been turned into francs and they are in the Swiss bank. My

* Little mother.

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house is in Swedish kronen. All my movables, including my collections of porcelains have been turned with the help of a kind friend into Spanish pesetas. I am taking with me a small collection of miniatures from one of the palaces given to me by an acquaintance. But please don't imagine anything nasty. I'll save them. And I'll return to Russia only after I have been told by a person whom I can trust implicitly that everything is again as it was formerly."

Oblienissimoff embraced Sablin and his eyes were full of tears.

When Sablin left Oblienissimoff his heart was full of a feeling of bitter perplexity. The porter with spectacles on his nose sat reading his paper. He no longer wore a livery and did not stir when Sablin went up to the coat-rack.

Towards the end of August Sablin being now again in the field, his former chauffeur Petroff arrived from Petersburg and brought him a voluminous letter from Tania. When Sablin looked at the thick envelope addressed in a hand-writing so like the one of his late wife Vera Constantinovna his heart sank with foreboding.

"My dear, beloved, brave Papa," Tania wrote. "I feel, my truthful father, my pride, I must write to you, you whom I love and respect above all, I know that you will understand me and will not blame me, and maybe will praise me.

"You know, Papa, from my last letter that Nika and Pavlik Polejaeff attempted to release him and that they failed. They are obliged to hide temporarily and are in a place of safety. Petroff will tell you everything in detail. On the 31st of July, they were taken to Tobolsk." The letter went on to describe the arrival of the Imperial family at Tobolsk and their life there as told in letters to the Grand Duchess Olga Nicholaievna.

Tania proceeded: "Papa, you will understand me and won't blame me. I have sold all my diamonds, my furs and my dresses. I have sold all that belonged to me. I dressed up as a peasant woman, I bought the clothes of the girl from Perelessino who brings milk to the Polejaeffs. Three days I studied her ways, and I start tomorrow morning to be nearer to them.

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I have her passport. Now, Papa, I am Tatiana Shagina, a peasant of the village Perelessino of the Tsarskoie Selo district. Sister Valentine says it is an exploit. No, Papa, it is my duty. Oh, if I could only help them. If I could only approach them at early mass and whisper to them: 'We haven't forgotten you. We think about you, we—Russia!' . . . To dispel their hopeless thoughts, to destroy the calm terror of their monotonously planned existence. Papa! Bless me and pray for me. It is my duty. I kiss you fondly, fondly, and know that you, my noble-minded, my honest Papa, would have acted in the same way if you were in my place.

Your little Tania."

"My Great Tania," thought Sablin. "So that is how the blood of the Sablins pays their Empress for the terrible insult it has suffered. Vera's spirit did not stop Tania—the pale hand of her mother did not call her into my locked study, didn't open the box and didn't give her the diary to read which will be put with me into my coffin? But did my Vera wish to revenge herself on the Empress? She carried with her to the grave her touching adoration for the sacred names of the Tsar and the Tsaritsa.

"My Great Tania! May God bless you in your exploit! And I? I must work for my opportunity."

X

SEVERAL days later Sablin went to Petersburg on a fourteen days leave. He wanted to look about and observe what was going on and then decide what he was to do. The Moscow State Committee gave him fresh hopes. Besides this Sablin had a matter of personal interest, which he had voluntarily taken upon himself, and the accomplishment of which he considered to be a question of honour. It was the providing for and the settling of the fate of Kozloff's widow and daughter. Sablin knew that she was in distress, that she could not obtain from the new government even the small pension she was entitled to after her husband's death, and that she was threatened with dismissal from the hospital where she was lying. Sablin decided to de-

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posit a considerable sum of money in her name and to provide for her with Matzneff's assistance.

It was to his old comrade that Sablin went after his arrival in Petersburg, with Korniloff's name on his lips and with the confidence that there must be a change, that there must be a break in Russia's disasters.

"You think that Korniloff will be Russia's Napoleon," Matzneff said, after he had listened to Sablin seriously and attentively. "I fear you are mistaken. He does not play the right instrument and the proper tune which could take possession of the minds of the Russian people. No, Sasha, if you are searching for a Napoleon then come to me at seven o'clock this evening and I will show you a true Napoleon, who knows what must be done and who can fish in troubled waters. Borrow the porter's clothes, because if you come as a General you probably won't get out alive, and it is worth while listening to what will be said."

"And where will you take me?"

"I will take you to the abode of refined depravity, where baths of onyx were to be found, where the cult of woman reigned, where the modern Frina shone, who attained beauty by divinizing her body, who made cynicism a thing of beauty and was herself so impregnated with incense that she became celestial."

"This is interesting," said Sablin.

"Yes, it was extremely interesting. Notwithstanding all my indifference to feminine beauty and to women I understood her and those who surrounded her. Now you will see something totally different. Will you come?"

"Yes," answered Sablin.

A dense crowd was standing before Kshesinskaya's * marble house with its Pompeian balcony. The people trampled the grass and the flower-beds with their heavy boots, crushed the rusty lilac bushes and the bluish American fir-trees. Sailors in low-necked blue and white shirts with bare chests, untouched by the

* Famous dancer of the Imperial Petersburg Ballet.

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sun, adorned with jewelled chains and pendants, with designs of anchors, serpents and dragons tattooed on their arms, soldiers in grey tunics and grey trousers, in shoes and puttees, wearing their caps at the back of their heads, with locks of hair falling on their foreheads, Cossacks in elegant tunics and blue breeches, with red bands so wide that from a distance they seemed to be entirely red; young officers dressed like soldiers, with their arms flung round the men's necks, stood among handsome, eager-faced young women, dressed in bright showy clothes.

Amid the predominating grey mass of soldiers and officers were to be seen the dark shabby clothes of workmen and of young intelligent looking men as well as the coat of the educated man, who standing on tip-toe looked eagerly and open-mouthed over the heads of the crowd; young girls as well as schoolboys; students; a priest in his cassock, could be seen.

About nine o'clock in the evening, Matzneff, dressed up as an apache, in a wide-brimmed hat, in an old suit and a plaid thrown over his shoulders, pushed his way through the crowd, accompanied by Sablin wearing Petroff's jacket and cap and giving himself the airs of an independent comrade who knows his own worth.

A red flame flashed and disappeared in front and above the crowd, as if red electric lamps were being tested or rockets fired.

"It means that the anarchists will lecture again," said a soldier who stood in front of Sablin.

"Not anarchists but communists, a difference must be made between them," corrected his neighbour.

"Lenin will speak, Lenin himself," said a wide-shouldered handsome sailor who stood in the front row.

Matzneff pulling Sablin after him pushed through to the sailor's side and asked him:

"Tell me, comrade, who is this Lenin?"

"Lenin? Haven't you heard? Its even been in the papers. Lenin is a German spy. He came in a sealed car from Germany to help the Germans. I have read that he has received seventy millions from them for this work."

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"And why is he allowed to do it?"

The sailor looked suspiciously at Matzneff.

"And why not? Now is freedom. Everyone can do what he pleases. You must reason and find out for yourself what is right and what is wrong. The secret treaties of the Tsarist diplomacy exist no longer.

"But nevertheless, comrade, we are at war and here is a man who comes from the enemy's country having received money there. Formerly spies and traitors used to be hung."

"That's so," said a young soldier in a tunic without shoulder-straps, eating sun-flower seeds and joining the conversation. "Under the Tsar's régime there was criminal punishment and oppression of every kind and now there is freedom. They say that Lenin speaks justly about everything and also about the war, and it remains to be proved whether he is a spy. Perhaps people are being duped intentionally because he belongs to the people and stands up for their rights. And who are you?"

Matzneff did not answer.

Red lamps flared up on the balcony of Kshesinskaya's house, lighting it up. It was draped with red bunting; enormous red flags waved gently beside it. Night had already fallen, the sunset had faded, it was dark and in this obscurity Kshesinskaya's balcony stood out like a bloody niche.

A group of young people came out on to the balcony talking animatedly. Some of them were dressed in lounge suits, others wore soldier shirts, but they all had large red bows pinned on their chests with ends falling down to their waists. They looked as if they had enjoyed a good meal and a good drink. A thin man with a typical Jewish face stood out among them. He wore glasses, had unequally lifted eyebrows, a moustache and a small, Mephistopheles beard. He moved slightly forward and stood in a proud attitude with his arms folded on his chest.

"Trotsky, Trotsky," was murmured in the crowd.

"And they are all Jews," said someone good-naturedly.

"Jews are people like the rest," answered someone in the crowd.

"They are cleverer than many Russians."

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A movement of deference was noticeable in the group as a small, awkwardly built man, passing through it advanced to the very edge of the balcony.

"Lenin, that's Lenin," was heard in the crowd.

"I tell you straight out, Jenny," Sablin heard a low voice saying behind him: "The Russian has to be startled. You remember my telling you about the image of Kasan and about Seraphim Sarowsky?*" Well, it's the same with Lenin: 'Here I come straight from Germany; everyone knows that I am a spy, I've even been paid for it and you see I'm speaking with you and teaching you.' It is boundless impudence. That's what Russian people like. They will most certainly follow him."

Lenin had short legs and a long body with a stout prominent stomach. He was dressed in a common-looking lounge suit that seemed red in the red light and he also wore a red bow. His large head with its ugly face was poised on a short neck. He was quite bald. His small squinting eyes under thin brows were gray. His irregular flat nose, scanty moustache and small pointed beard under a voluptuous mouth gave him the appearance of a typical book-keeper, school-master or bank-clerk. There was nothing of the people in him, nothing Russian, and still less nothing of a Napoleon. At times the senseless smile of an idiot contorted his puffed-out cheeks. He was a monster in the full sense of the word, a product of degeneration brought on by an intellectual life surpassing his mental capacity as well as by the calm, inactive life of a philosopher.

He came up to the balustrade, upholstered in red, rested his hands on it and gazed silently and long at the crowd.

"All authority to the Soviets!" he exclaimed at last and then began speaking.

He spoke incoherently, his elocution was bad, his sentences abrupt, he often repeated himself and Sablin gradually formed the impression that this small man was knocking with an enormous hammer into the brains of the people who listened to him,

* A well-known Hermit, who was beloved and worshipped for his saintly life. He was canonized during the reign of the Emperor Nicolas II.

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with the stubbornness of idiots, to his boldly criminal and at the same time simple ideas.

"All authority to the Soviets!" repeated Lenin; "because it is the true authority of the people. The power must belong to the indigent, to the poor, to the proletariat. The capitalists have oppressed and driven the people for many centuries, they have drunk the people's blood. The hour of retribution and of justice has struck. Everything they possess is not theirs but it has been taken by them from someone else. He who possesses has committed theft. Possession is theft. There'll be truth in the world only when no one will possess anything, but everything will belong to all; so the one who takes is acting rightly, because he is taking what has been robbed. Rob what has been robbed and then we will see what must be done. That is the way to spread the revolution."

The crowd listened breathlessly. The soldier who stood near Sablin and who was eating sun-flower seeds never took his eyes off Lenin's face, forgetting even to spit out the husks.

Matzneff lived with his wife at the end of Pushkinsky street. He had two children, a boy of fourteen and a girl of six, and he knew better than anyone else that they were not his own. The husband and wife lived in different parts of the house and it happened that they did not meet for several weeks at a time. But since the beginning of the war they had somehow been drawn together by the interest they both took in the war, and since the revolution they had become good friends. Manozkovsky's death in 1915 at the head of his regiment and Varvara Dmitrievna's efforts to conceal her great sorrow contributed in no small degree to this change. At that time Matzneff had shown her true Christian sympathy and comforted her by his intelligent and friendly talks. Varvara Dmitrievna was still handsome and young looking. She was a clever, well-educated woman.

"Varia, will you give us some tea?" Matzneff said.

"Varia," will you give us some tea?" Matzneff said.

They sat down in the dining-room.

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"So you see, Sasha, Lenin appears to be something of a riddle."

"Excuse me, Ivan Sergeievitch," Varvara Dmitrievna interrupted him, "are you going to speak about politics?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll go round the rooms and see if anyone is listening. Although Marfa has been in my service for twenty years, and I took her as a child and trained her myself, she is now always hanging about the doors trying to overhear something and then go and report it to the commissariat. Paul is also quite changed. He won't wear his livery anymore, he says it is the uniform of a slave."

XI

SABLIN arrived at the General Headquarters early in the morning. At nine o'clock every morning a car was sent to the station to meet those who had come to the General Headquarters on business and bring them to the Staff. Sablin found Mogileff in a state of excitement and anxiety. A continual stream of people was going up and down the palace stairs. The Commander-in-Chief was busy. Sablin was asked to wait on the landing. An officer with a bandaged head and an artificial leg, a complete invalid and apparently not quite sane approached Sablin and began talking to him.

"I have just been present at the meeting of the Union of invalids," he said. "We have unanimously decided to follow Korniloff. His cause is sacred and he stood up for the officers. It is time to put an end to all this indecency."

His manner and his words perplexed Sablin.

"Korniloff's position must be pretty bad if it is the invalids who think of defending him," Sablin thought.

The aide-de-camp on duty came out on to the landing and told Sablin that the Commander-in-Chief would see him.

"But only for a few minutes," he added.

He showed Sablin into a study with two tables and a few chairs. The door was thrown wide-open and a man of medium height came into the room quickly, with firm and resolute steps.

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He carried his small head high. His squinting, shining eyes under delicate brows had a searching look. Sablin could not help noting the nobility and charm of his manner and movements. He gave Sablin his hand, asking him quickly: "Are you with us or against us, General?"

"I am with those who desire Russia's welfare and happiness," Sablin said firmly. "I am with those who serve the army and its honour. I am with you, Your Excellency."

"Fate itself has sent you to me. Are you acquainted with the situation?"

"Scarcely."

"I have ordered the Temporary Government to be arrested. I take the whole weight of authority upon myself, so as to re-establish order. Krimoff's cavalry corps has been sent to Petrograd. I suppose Krimoff must have reached it already. Go there, I shall need you."

"We have no proofs so far, Your Excellency," the Chief-of-Staff remarked gently, "permitting us to believe that Krimoff is in Petrograd. Wouldn't it be more prudent to direct the General to Pskoff to General Klembovsky who needs firm men?"

Korniloff glanced quickly at the Chief-of-Staff.

"You are right," he said. "Go to Pskoff to General Klembovsky; he will receive you and give you the necessary directions."

"When do you wish me to start?"

"Immediately," said Korniloff shaking Sablin's hand and giving him to understand that his audience was over.

"The train leaves at two," said the Chief-of-Staff. "I shall have a seat reserved for you in the Staff-car."

At two o'clock that afternoon Sablin left Mogileff in a compartment which had been reserved for him. He reached Pskoff late at night. The station was overcrowded with soldiers. There was a great bustle and noise, as was the case everywhere in these after-revolutionary days. There were no vehicles at the station. Sablin went to the Commandant to ask for a car from the Army garage. The Commandant was disconcerted and harassed by soldiers and officers who were crowding round

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him asking for night-lodgings and for places on the train. He looked at Sablin with fatigue and absent-mindedness.

"What can I do for you, Your Excellency?" he inquired, looking up at Sablin, and suddenly smiled pleasantly and Sablin recognised Captain Mikhailitchenko, the officer whom he had decorated at the same time as Karpoff in the village of Ozeri. "My God, Your Excellency, how come you to be here?"

"I am sent to General Klembovsky."

"General Klembovsky is not here, Your Excellency. He left for Petersburg yesterday. It is General Bontch-Brouevitch who is in command of the front at present, by order of Kerensky."

"By order of Kerensky?" Sablin asked severely. "And Korniloff?"

"Korniloff is probably arrested, at any rate we don't know where he is. There is no communication with the General Headquarters. General Alexeieff has gone there. In fact it is the commissars and the Soviet of Soldiers' and Workers' deputies who dispose of everything at the front. Yesterday an officer was killed in the street for speaking slightly of the Soviet. The murderers are known, but they were left free. We expect that the officers may be murdered any night."

"And Krimoff?"

"He is in Luga, but it is said Kerensky summoned him to Petrograd and he has been arrested there. General Pestretzoff, our former Commander of the Army, is here. Allow me, Your Excellency, to call him up. You could pass the night at his place, it will be better to do so, as there are no rooms to be had."

"All right," Sablin said.

Pestretzoff was yet up although it was two o'clock in the morning. Sablin hunted him up in a large government building standing on the bank of the river Velikaya. He lived with his wife in an apartment which had been requisitioned for him.

At supper, besides Nina Nicholaievna and Pestretzoff, there was a modest looking young man in a soldier's uniform. Pestretzoff introduced him as the assistant of the commissar.

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After supper Pestretzoff settled Sablin in his study. The neighbouring room was full of armed soldiers.

"What is that?" asked Sablin.

"The guard," whispered Pestretzoff. "The Soviet sent it to protect me."

"But on whose side are you, tell me for Heaven's sake, are you with the Soviets or with Korniloff?"

Pestretzoff waved his hands in dismay, placed a finger on his lips and left the room hastily.

Sablin awoke early. He got up and went into the dining room, where to his astonishment he found Pestretzoff already drinking tea.

"Where are you going so early?" Pestretzoff asked.

"For a walk," Sablin answered.

"Let us go together. My little commissar is sleeping and I am free," Pestretzoff said.

They went to the river-side.

Sablin heard in the distance the familiar measured clatter of horses' hoofs; it was cavalry marching through the town. He stopped. Squadrons of dragoons on black horses were passing over the bridge in the direction of Zavelichie. The beautiful horses, the riders with their lances hanging behind their shoulders, were outlined against the background of the fortress-walls of old Pskoff. Sablin was seized by a feeling of intense sadness.

"Krimoff has committed suicide in Petrograd," whispered Pestretzoff abruptly. "General Korniloff is arrested by the order of Kerensky. General Alexseieff has arrived at the General Headquarters. Kerensky has proclaimed himself Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy. Krimoff's entire Cavalry Army has betrayed Korniloff and a delegation of Cossacks and soldiers came to Kerensky and informed him of their willingness to serve him. Kerensky works in complete understanding with the Soviets. Sasha, of course, you are all by yourself in life, you have no one and nothing you care for, you may take risks. But what is the use of risking? Of course if

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a true Napoleon existed then I too would join him. And who knows, perhaps it is they who are right?"

"They who?" Sablin asked in a tired voice.

"The New Russia, the Democracy, the Proletariat, the Soviets. Fathers never understand their children. And we too don't understand them. And who knows, truth may be on their side."

"Truth in treason to the Country, truth in the delivery of our positions to the enemy, truth in the murder of the best and most honest Officers and Generals, truth in pillage and violence!" Sablin exclaimed looking at Pestretzoff.

That same evening Sablin left for Perikalie to join his Corps, where he learned that he had been removed from the command of the Corps by Kerensky and summoned to Petersburg.

XII

PETROFF'S small house in which the brothers Polejaeff were hiding lay in the depths of the Novgorod government in the village Zaposdalovo; it was so remote that it was not even marked on the map. The whole village consisted of six houses standing in one line on the side of a lake.

One October morning when Pavlik and Nika were just up and were having their tea, Mashoutka, the old woman's neice, ran into the room. Her hair was dishevelled and loose strands showed from under her shawl; her black eyes glistened brightly and her face was rosy-red from the early morning frost.

"Two people are in the forest inquiring for you Sirs, and they ask you to come at once."

"What sort of people," Pavlik and Nika asked simultaneously.

"Who can tell? They are dressed like common people but they look like gentlemen. One of them is of your age, the other is a mere lad."

Pavlik and Nika went to the forest; two individuals were waiting for them at its edge. Their faces were thin, they shivered with cold, after the night spent in the forest.

"Dear me, you, Ermoloff!" Nika exclaimed.

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"Yes, it's I, and that's my brother Misha."

"Michail Ermoloff, pupil of the sixth class," Misha said in a deep voice.

"Come along with us. You'll get warm in the cottage and have some tea," Nika said.

"How did you find us?" Nika inquired when they were inside.

"Oh, your Petroff! I went to see him eight times," said Ermoloff, "before he would trust me and believe that I came from General Sablin. Only then would he tell us how we were to find you. We need you, friends, there is trouble on hand."

The four young men talked a long time over what had been going on. They decided to go to Petrograd and take a hand in affairs. The Kerensky Government was breaking up.

"Where will we go to?" Nika asked.

"We will see. If everything is quiet, then to Sablin's apartment. We will consult him. After that we will go to the Soviet of the Cossacks on the Znamenskaya. Our staff is there. And then we will see what is to be done."

"I'll tell you what I think," Misha said. "We must form a group of about twenty men armed with hand-grenades, and besides try and persuade fifty comrades to join us; then go all together to the Soviet of Soldiers' and Workmens' deputies and when Lenin is speaking, shout: 'Kill them!' and rush at them with our grenades. I am sure it will work."

So they set out on their adventure, which landed them in a capital already in the throes of the disturbances which exchanged Kerensky's rule for that of Lenin. They literally ran the gauntlet of Bolstein to make way into the Ruler's Palace quartered by a Corps of Cadets. As they stood before the gateway, bullets were ringing against the iron.

"Open, friends!" Ermoloff shouted breathlessly.

The wicket was opened and a Cadet let them pass into the yard.

A bon-fire was burning and about twenty Cadets were sitting near it. They surrounded the new-comers.

"The chief trouble," said a Cadet, "is that there is no one in

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command. Kerensky has gone away and the ministers have locked themselves up here and do nothing but talk. . . .”

“Have you heard, gentlemen,” another Cadet said, coming out of the palace, “Paltchinsky has just told us that the ministers have received a message from the Town Hall that the social workers, the merchants, the people and the clergy are coming to deliver the palace. They will soon be here. . . .”

“Can you let us have some fire, gentlemen?” said a girl of about twenty-five approaching the group of Cadets. She wore a great-coat over her skirt and a cartridge belt was fixed round her waist.

“Won’t you come and sit with us, Lenotchka?”

“I haven’t time,” and Lenotchka took a burning piece of wood and ran with it to the palace.

“Well, and how do they behave?” Pavlik asked.

“They are all right. They are only too eager to fight. It is the ‘shock-company of the Womens’ Death Battalion.’ They have already fought in the Millionnaya Street. They accomplished the sortie in proper form, carrying their rifles correctly, and a woman officer led them—revolver in hand. Now they occupy together with us the first story of the palace.”

The Cadets talk died away. The pale dawn was drawing near.

Nika sat apart looking at the Cadets who surrounded the bonfire. After the sleepless night their faces were pale and tired. A good-looking Cadet, thin and slender like a young girl, lay on the steps with his delicate face pressed against the dark boards of the guard-house. The Cadet with the black moustache slept sitting up beside him and snored loudly. One called Wagner sat in an arm-chair, which had been brought out of the palace and looked at the sky with dreamy eyes which a bluish circle surrounded. He noticed that Nika was looking at him and came towards him.

“I consider the whole business utterly hopeless,” he said. “We are less than four hundred, we have not enough cartridges and we are completely cut off. Kerensky ran away the 25th of October, today or tomorrow Polkovnikoff will betray us or

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also run away and what will become of us then? The 'Avrora' has entered the Neva, she has already fired at the town. Two good shots and nothing will remain of the palace."

"But what is to be done? We can't surrender," Nika said.

"No, to surrender is impossible; they will shoot us and torture us. Vertounoff told us, that when the Cadets were led to be shot, the mother of one of them, a well educated and well dressed woman of about forty, threw herself down on her knees before the Red guards and implored them screaming: 'I am his mother, give him back to me!' A Red guard cursed at her and said: 'Well, then just see us kill your puppy!' and fired at him one shot after another, while she crawled on her knees around him, catching hold of his legs. What can we expect from them?"

It was now the 30th of October. The situation in the Winter Palace was getting gradually worse. The Cadets of the Oranienbaum School had left. The Peterhof School of N.C.O's. was not reliable. Who was reliable? Who could be trusted? It was evident that the Winter Palace was no longer held by the Cadets, but by the Bolsheviks. The Cadets were crowded in the picture-gallery and in the Field-Marshal's Hall forming the immediate guard of the Temporary Government, which was deliberating about the surrender of the palace.

Petersburg illuminated by bon-fires was in a turmoil of agitation and the victory of the Bolsheviks was to be felt in the dull noise of the crowd, the hootings of the cars which had suddenly reappeared.

"It is impossible to surrender. It is dishonourable to surrender," was repeated in the hall, passages and staircases of the palace, when suddenly the terrible and startling news: "The white flag is hoisted over the palace . . . !" was spread among the defenders.

A dense, agitated crowd suddenly poured into the square before the palace filling it with its tumult. Sharp words of command sounded in the crowd. Big crowds of sailors, soldiers and Red guards rushed into the gates and doors of the palace and penetrated into it from all sides. Sailors from the "Avrora"

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stepped out of the crowd and surrounded the members of the Temporary Government. For several minutes a subdued drone of many thousand voices could be heard in the palace. The comrades were still careful of keeping a revolutionary discipline, when suddenly a shot was fired—a Cadet had committed suicide.

The shot seemed to wake up the crowd. It passed from a condition of motionless expectancy into one of intense activity, and began dragging things off the tables, tearing the upholstery off the chairs and sofas. Men were to be seen, laughing and carrying in their arms the young girls of the Women's Battalion. Separate cries rose above the general noise and rang all over the palace.

"Save me, save me!" Lenotchka screamed, while sailors dragged her through the rooms of the lower story.

"Carry her on to the Tsar's bed. Well, there are plenty of them here!"

"That's fine!"

"Help! Help!"

"Oh, Lord!"

The beasts were feasting and revelling all over the palace, allaying their thirst for blood and crime. Groups of eight, ten people could be seen gathered together in the dusk; groans, heavy breathing, cynical curses and abuse rung out on all sides. The Cadets were disarmed and led into the yard to be removed elsewhere.

"Bring a machine-gun, we will finish them all off here," shouted a sailor laughing, his eyes aglow with merriment.

A young officer, wearing a great-coat with shoulder-straps and a red band on his sleeve, made his way through the crowd and approached the Cadets, pushing the sailors aside with an air of authority.

He ordered them to form ranks.

"Nothing will happen to you. Comrade Schlossberg convey them to the Fortress."

That night in the yard of the Fortress, near the mint, beside the Troubetskoy Ravelin, the Cadets were crowded like cattle. Some of them lay on the wet stones, others stood leaning against

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the wall, while some crouched on the ground. Armed workmen sat round a bon-fire near the gates. A thin, cold rain was drizzling and the night seemed endless.

Misha and his brother as well as Pavlik and Nika were there. Wagner with his pale, girlish face kept close to them. He took Nika aside and began speaking.

"You know, Lenotchka was my fiancée. I don't want to live anymore. In the Degtiarnaya street in the house number twenty-eight, lodging twenty-six in the yard . . . my mother. . . . Tell her, how I died."

The Cadets came up to the Red guards and talked to them. They were workmen, all of them young fellows, some dressed in black coats, others without them, but all had cartridge-pouches and machine-gun belts tied round them. They stood leaning on their rifles, joking and talking.

"Well, gentlemen—bourgeois, your day is passed. The day before yesterday a hundred of your kind were exterminated in the Smolensky field."

"And where did the Cossacks go?" the Cadets asked.

"To Gatchino. But they were so few—four hundred in all followed Kerensky. The majority was for the authority of the people."

Late at night it became known that the captured ministers had been brought to the Fortress.

"This is the end of the Temporary Government, comrades. The workmen's and peasants' authority is established in Russia and now we will have peace, bread and land. Nobody will do you any harm, cadets," the Red guards said.

"Do you think Tania and Olia feel anything of what is happening to us?" Nika whispered to Pavlik.

"Better not think! Olia is in Tsarskoie Selo, and Tsarskoie. . . ."

"God is merciful."

"Do you think we will be shot?"

"If they at least did not torture us!"

A foggy, gloomy and damp day broke at last. A motor-lorry drove noisily along the narrow street and stopped at the gate.

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A young pale-faced man entered the yard, surrounded by armed sailors. He was holding a paper and a revolver in his hand.

"Cadets, form ranks," he shouted.

The Cadets began forming two lines; their faces were pale and their eyes gloomy.

"The authority of the Soviets has triumphed!" the young man began saying. "All over Russia order is being restored and the Soviet of peoples' commissars has decided to grant their lives to all who were led astray and were deceived by the mad leaders working for the reaction. Sign this paper in which you acknowledge the authority of the Soviets and pledge yourself not to step against it arms in hand. After that you are free. You may all go home. Swear."

The Cadets were silent; many of them breathed heavily, tears were in their tired eyes.

"I swear," exclaimed a young voice, endeavouring to sound deep and solemn. "I swear to struggle all my life against the violators of the Russian people and to kill the traitor, the spy, the scoundrel—Lenin."

"What's that, who spoke?" screamed the young man in authority.

"I did," Misha said stepping forward. "Sign the paper, gentlemen. It is forced upon you and is worthless. My blood will release you from your oath."

"To the wall!" the young man shrieked.

A sailor pushed Misha so roughly that he fell forward on the stones, but immediately rose and went to the wall with firm steps.

He stood against the wall and his big, radiant eyes shone like an angel's on an image.

"Fire!" the young man shouted taking aim himself.

"For the Tsar and for Russia!"

About ten rifles clicked sharply. A dark spot of blood suddenly stood out on the pale face. The eyes closed, the body swayed forward helplessly and dropped face-downwards onto the damp flags, from under which brown grass was peeping.

"Villains, hangmen!" Wagner shouted and rushed at the

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young man, but rough hands caught hold of him and put him to the wall.

"I will finish this one off myself," the young man in authority said, drawing a step nearer to Wagner. He fired straight at his temple.

"Long live the revolution," he shouted, continuing to shoot in a state of frenzy at Wagner's dead body.

"Well, gentlemen! Whoever fancies it can take his turn."

The Cadets stood in complete silence. Some were trembling visibly.

"Come and sign."

Half an hour later they were leaving the Fortress. They walked silently avoiding looking at one another.

A motor-lorry passed them under the Fortress gate-way and made them crush to the wall: the sailors were driving away. They sat along the sides of the car and two bodies were lying at the bottom of the lorry. A sailor snatched his rifle and fired over the cadets heads making them start involuntarily. The men laughed roughly. Having passed the bridge the Cadets dispersed and slowly went to their homes. All around was the boisterous street mob. Soldiers were sauntering about and screams of "Long live the Soviet Republic!" filled the air.

XIII

ALL this time Sablin stayed in his apartment scarcely ever going out. What could he do? He, a General of the Emperor's suite. His appearance alone would be sufficient to excite and enrage the soldiers. At first he tried to find some work and went to the War Minister Verchovsky. Verchovsky came from a good family; he had begun his education in the military Pages' Corps. Verchovsky expressed his astonishment that Sablin applied to him. He had not been informed that Kerensky had appointed Sablin to serve in his staff.

"Such experienced Generals as you are must be at the front. The Army needs them. In any case I will inquire what directions have been given concerning you and will inform you. Do you live here?"

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Sablin gave his address.

"Very well. There is such an amount of work to be done, we have received such a heavy inheritance, that you won't remain without employment."

This had taken place on the 18th of September, but September had passed, October was coming to an end, and no one had troubled Sablin, he had not been called up by telephone and had received no papers from the War Minister's Office.

Sauntering in the streets, meeting and talking to his fellow-officers of the guard Sablin soon understood that he could not be called. Neither he, nor men sharing his convictions were needed by Kerensky, who did not want to reestablish and reorganize Russia and its Army, but to destroy and ruin both.

Sablin saw sometimes in the mornings disorderly ranks of soldiers drilling on the field of Mars. They stood for hours doing nothing, eating sun-flower seeds, chatting and laughing. Once he saw a squadron of his own regiment on the field of Mars. It was being exercised by a soldier. The horses were thin and badly groomed. The men rode badly, everything was dirty and rusty.

A youthful-looking officer, a Count Kangrin, stood apart. Sablin, who knew him, came up and asked him why it was not he who taught the men.

"Oh, Your Excellency," the Lieutenant answered excitedly, "they would not obey me. You see a miracle today: the committee itself ordered the drilling."

Sablin witnessed the murder of youthful cadets and officers. What could he do? He could only die, only be tortured and killed as they were. Sablin knew that he was doomed to die, that the Eremeieff's night of which the soldier spoke with such voluptuousness since the beginning of the March revolution, the night of the officers massacre, had already come. He understood that the Russian officers and all the educated classes were beginning to mount their Way of the Cross, and he likewise. He did not fear death. Life had long lost all meaning for him, because it had been deprived of the beauty which is brought into it by the family, the Fatherland, one's own regiment, the

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Army, victory and the Tsar, as the symbol of all that is elevated, and this beauty had been torn out of his heart, but he did not want to die like sheep or cattle that are being led to be slaughtered. He wanted to give his life fighting, and he waited for the beginning of the fight, when he would sacrifice his life for something big, and meanwhile he saved himself for it.

On October the 25th the red flag of mutiny passed into the hands of the Bolsheviks and they began their rapid work of destruction. The 2nd of November the Soviet of the peoples' Commissars summoned General Korotchan, a prominent artillery officer, the Chief of the Military Artillery School and member of the Artillery Academy, to Smolny to be questioned. The examination did not last long. He was not charged with any crime. The sailors led him out of Smolny, took him into a back street and killed him brutally.

In some cases people were grabbed, taken to Smolny, where a mock trial was gone through, then they were conveyed to the Petropavlovsk Fortress or into the Smolensky field where they were shot. Others were killed in the streets, in their homes, in hospitals, others were lynched and tortured to death—the Soviet authority exterminated and did away with all its enemies.

The 9th of November the new authority announced the appointment of the ensign Krilenko to the post of Supreme Commander. Krilenko's first order was to demand the sending of delegates from the whole front to negotiate with the Germans. Peace was to be concluded by the soldiers themselves without the participation of Generals and governments. Peace was to be signed by companies, battalions and regiments with the corresponding units of the enemy.

This was so new for International Law that even the Germans doubted the possibility of obtaining peace in this manner and decided to treat with the Stavka in Mogileff.

After the Supreme Commander Kerensky's flight from Mogileff, his functions had automatically passed to his Chief-of-Staff General Douchonin. He was still a young General, handsome, perfectly honest, but timorous and irresolute. He had completely surrendered himself to the commissars. It was they who

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

really commanded the army, he merely signing all the papers and orders. To him the Germans appealed.

He was indignant at such a suggestion and did not recognize Krilenko. Krilenko then boarded trains with bands of sailors and Letts, and moved towards the Stavka. They advanced slowly and cautiously. The smallest resistance offered by Korniloff's shock detachments would have been sufficient to make Krilenko and his bands flee in disorder. But after numerous meetings the shock battalions decided not to interfere and declared themselves neutral. Krilenko feared to take the risk of going to the Stavka and demanded that Douchonin should come and report to him in his train. He guaranteed him his entire safety. Vainly the commissars and Douchonin's friends dissuaded him from going to see Krilenko. Scarcely had Douchonin appeared on the platform of the station when brutal sailors rushed at him. They tore off his shoulder-straps and lynched him in Krilenko's presence. They stripped him naked, outraged his body and left it lying on the platform.

The dead man's widow and daughter came to fetch his body; they were conducted before it and only after having been insulted and mocked at were they permitted to take it to be interred. . . .

Douchonin's murder, committed in such a dastardly way, accompanied by exceptionably vile and cynical mutilations pleased the army of scoundrels and traitors. Since then every death-sentence of a General or an officer was delivered accompanied by a cynical leer, and by the verdict: "To join General Douchonin's Staff."

Sablin knew it all. He knew that he too was of the number of those who were doomed to receive a post in General Douchonin's Staff. Following Petroff's advice, who had remained true to him, although he served in Lenin's personal garage, Sablin had left his former apartment and continually moved from one flat into another, passing the nights with friends, mostly at Matzneff's, sometimes in Prince Repnin's empty home, sometimes in Gritzenko's or at Maria Fedorovna Morgenstern's apartment.

TO RED FLAG

His personal life was finished.

Sablin had aged by twenty years during these last three months. His hair had turned grey and only his figure retained its youthful appearance, and his military bearing had remained the same while his steel grey eyes shone and spoke of his indomitable will.

Around was a bustling crowd. People enjoyed themselves more than ever. The cinemas were overcrowded, the theatres were playing, Maria Fedorovna sang at concerts daily and this gaiety was like a feast during the plague, at a time when people stood in queues for long hours before the bakers' shops, when already no sugar was to be found, when meat had become a rarity and when half the shops were closed and their windows were nailed up with planks.

A letter from Tania. . . . Petroff had brought it. He had received it from a soldier, who had not wished to give his name. She had settled in Tobolsk. She sewed shirts for the soldiers who guarded the Emperor and she washed the linen of the Tsar's family. It enabled her to know all that was taking place at Tobolsk in the "Street of Freedom." Tania's trust, that the Russian people would understand the terrible crime they had committed and would release and restore to the throne their lawful Emperor, never forsook her. But she was becoming impatient. She feared for the inviolability of the Tsar's family. The bloody visions of the French revolution persecuted her.

"Papa," Tania wrote, "you must hurry. Something must be done, something must be undertaken. I have already told you in a former letter that I cannot define the present existence of the Emperor and of his family otherwise than by the words 'calm terror.' When I compare the nearest past with what is taking place now, I see that existence was still possible before, and that now life has become unbearable, owing to a thousand slights, insults, revolting, insolent deeds.

"I am sitting in a small room, not far from their house, and sew by the light of a petroleum lamp. All around is the cold Siberian winter. Deep snow lies in the streets and narrow, firm path-ways have been traced through its hard white layers,

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

which look like sugar. It is cold, Papa. When someone happens to pass by, the snow creaks so loudly that I can hear it in my cottage. My hostess, who is an old woman, sits in the next room. A cat has jumped on to my knees and lies on its back playing with the ball of cotton with its velvety paw. I am cosy here, Papa, but how are they?

"The Temporary Government has stopped sending them money. We go about in Tobolsk and collect for them among the merchants and the peasants. The educated classes don't give anything. Papa, the Russian Tsar who has to beg for his living! But he does not know it, we hide it from him.

"The new authority, I don't know, Papa, what kind of government it is, but evidently it is a nasty one, has announced by telegraph that it does not intend to keep the Tsar's family. Ten servants have already been dismissed, half a pound of sugar per month is allowed for one person. Bodily sufferings have been added to their intolerable spiritual torments.

"Papa! But it won't do! History will never forgive the Russian people this infamy. Papa, you must act, you must work. I do all I can. One of the soldiers who is on guard here has fallen in love with me. He is ugly, small, he has crooked legs, his face is marked with smallpox, he has a turned-up nose, a large mouth with big, bad teeth, he smells bad, he is stupid, but he is kind. I have promised to marry him, Papa, if he saves the Emperor and his family. He only thinks about it now.

"But you must work out there, in Russia, Papa. You Generals, whom he has favoured, you must influence the Allies. What are they thinking about? Is this the way they pay the Emperor for being true to his promises? Why don't King George and Queen Alexandra do something? And Poincaré and Foch? Are they so weak that they can't order the group of Jews who rule Russia to release God's crowned Tsar and cease torturing him? Papa, my own, beloved, truthful Papa. All my hopes are in you. But it is necessary to act. If nothing is done, nothing will be achieved. . . ."

Sablin called Petroff and asked him what the soldier who had brought the letter was like.

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It appeared that he had crooked legs, that his face was marked with small pox, that he had a turned-up nose, and a large mouth.

"My clever girl," Sablin thought. "She is right. One must act, and not wait!"

XIV

A DULL report, sounding like underground rumbling or like a whisper coming from behind a stone wall,—the dull report came that order was established on the Don and that everything was as it had been in former times. There was a disciplined army, gendarmes stood at the stations, the trains ran according to the time-tables, calm and peace reigned all over the Don region, Korniloff had been released from the Bichovsky prison, no one knew by what means. An officer of the General-Staff and a commissar had arrived at the prison with the order to release him and he was set free. The order was so cleverly counterfeited that no one doubted its authenticity. Korniloff was marching southward through the steppes surrounded by his loyal Turkomen. Cadets and officers were joining him. Once more a Russian Army was being formed in the South and it would deliver Russia from the yoke of the Bolsheviks!

It was Ermoloff who, having found Sablin at Maria Fedorovna Morgenstern's, had told him the news. He told him everything.

"We must escape, Your Excellency," Ermoloff said. "There is sure to be work for you there. On hearing your name soldiers and officers will gather around you."

It was decided that they would go to Rostoff and then see what was to be done. Ermoloff promised that he would be the first to start; he promised to look about, to call on the Ataman Kaledin, to settle matters with him, to find General Alexseieff and to meet Sablin at Rostoff with a report of all he had learned. The brothers Polejaeff would go with Sablin and form his guard, but they would keep apart as if they were strangers; they would take Olia with them; she would join the Smolny Institute which had just been sent to the south.

"And I will go with you," Maria Fedorovna said suddenly.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"If you travel with a lady, Alexander Nicolaievitch, you will attract less attention. You will only be a bourgeois, one out of the great number who now go southward in search of luck. If you go alone, you will be considered a counter-revolutionary and you will not escape serious troubles."

"Go, Moussia," Gritzenko said looking into the sorrowful, big blue eyes of his friend. "You are right, you are wise."

"But what will you do there?" Sablin asked.

"Rostoff is a gay town and I will always manage to earn my living there. Maybe I will sing in the operetta, it has always been my dream."

"And you, Pavel Ivanovitch?" Sablin asked.

"I will remain here. I have an eighty-year-old mother, Sasha, how can I leave her? I will manage to live somehow. We have decided with Matzneff to hold out to the end. Who knows, maybe by the spring Kaledin will be in Moscow and you will also be drawing near with Korniloff. And I have also a great faith in the Germans. It would not be the first time that the Warangians would deliver us."

Sablin went to the office of the Company of the International sleeping cars. It appeared that tickets for Rostoff could not be easily procured. They were all sold out up to the second of February. A clerk, whom Sablin knew and who had sold him tickets before, told him to come and inquire daily. Tickets might be returned by people who, having reserved them in advance, changed their minds at the last moment.

"Only excuse me," he said, "I will not put your name down in my books. Give me some other one, because I know you are being searched for."

"Morgenstern," Sablin said without hesitating.

"Excellent, it is a Swedish name, it'll even be better so. The 'tovaristchi' have still retained a certain fear for foreigners. Will you believe, that what saves us yet is the inscription on our cars of: 'Compagnie Internationale.' They imagine that we have something in common with their new God—the International, and don't touch us."

There happened to be tickets for January the 22nd but the

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same clerk informed Sablin that the train would not run any further than the station Lissky, because it was reported that fighting was going on near that station between the Cossacks and the Bolsheviks. The clerk did not know any details.

It was to this inner front that Sablin was hurrying and his heart beat with youthful ardour in anticipation of battle and victory.

They travelled to Moscow without incidents; Maria Fedorovna and Olia Polejaeff in the ladies' compartment, Sablin in another one with Pavlik and Nika and a rich Jew from Rostoff, named Kappelbaum. The car was crowded. The passage was so full of officers and soldiers that it was impossible to open the door of the compartment and to go to the lavatory, where the windows were smashed, where water failed and three "tovaristchi" snored lustily under the wash-stand. If it were not for these details one might forget that one was travelling after the revolution. The compartment was clean, fresh linen lay on the berths and the electric light burnt brightly.

Sablin was dressed in a winter coat with a fur-collar, and wore a soft beaver cap, lent him by the brother of Varvara Dmitrievna Matzneff. Kappelbaum took him for a merchant. Pavlik and Nika wore also civilian clothes.

The soldiers felt intimidated on finding themselves in the passage of an International car and behaved decently and quietly.

They had to change in Moscow and as there were no through trains, they hired carriages and paid the cabman the extravagant fare of twenty-five roubles. The train was to start from the Kursk station in the evening and the porter told them that a struggle and a row generally accompanied the securing of seats. An hour before the train was formed, the entire platform was crowded with soldiers, who carried not only bags and small trunks, but some of them even rifles, and as soon as the train drew up before the platform they all rushed, pushing and crushing one another and immediately filled all the cars.

"They did this once yesterday," the porter told them, "and

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

pushed a woman upon the lines. She was crushed to death by the train. They don't mind anything."

But again there was order in the International car. The soldiers did not penetrate into the compartments but stayed in the passages; they stopped one another, saying it was a foreign car. They were evidently firmly convinced that everything belonging to their own country could be robbed and destroyed with impunity, but they stood in awe of anything that was foreign, fearing they might have to answer for it.

They reached Voronej without adventures. There the train stopped for an hour, when a guard came and told them that as the Cossacks were fighting under Tchertkovo and refused to let the train pass, the travellers might either leave the train or travel back.

Sablin, Pavlik and Nika gathered together to decide what was to be done. A young, energetic looking engineer, a Caucasian highlander called Artschanoff, joined them. He had occupied Kappelbaum's seat, when the latter passed into another compartment. Nika was of the opinion that they had better leave the train at Voronej and cross the frontline with horses. Artschanoff took part in the conversation.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, if I allow myself to give you advice," he said. "Follow my example. Where are you going to? To Rostoff?"

"Yes, to Rostoff," Sablin answered.

"Well, I am also going to Rostoff. We will return to Griazi and board the train for Tsaritsin. It is perfectly quiet there. From Tsaritsin we will go to Torgovaya and from there by the new line to Rostoff."

"And why not cross the front with horses?" Nika asked.

"But you are an officer, are you not?" Artschanoff asked, looking straight at Nika.

Nika hesitated.

"That is. . . . I was an officer," he said.

"That makes no difference. If you fall into the hands of the Red guards they will shoot you soon enough and besides the other gentleman is travelling with a lady," and he nodded at

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Sablin, "and you have a young girl to take care of. It is winter now and who can tell all you will have to face on the way. And if you follow my advice we will lose only one day."

Pavlik was of Artschanoff's opinion; Sablin did not say anything, but it was evident that he also did not care to arrive at the front in civilian dress and begin his adventures by becoming a captive of the Bolsheviks. It was decided to remain in the train.

They got off the train at Griazi early in the morning and waited for one which would take them to Tsaritsin. The traffic was carried on irregularly, but at the demand of the soldiers, who crowded at the station in great numbers, the station master consented to send a goods train to Tsaritsin.

"You won't object, gentlemen, to giving the guards thirty roubles each," Artschanoff said. "They will chose a less dirty car and we will travel in it to Tsaritsin all by ourselves, a company of bourgeois."

Everyone agreed, Kappelbaum, Artschanoff and a young telegraph official took the settling of the matter upon themselves and, after numerous visits to the committee of railway men and lengthy confidential conversations, matters began to shape themselves favourably.

"We don't accept bribes, comrades," a young railway official told Artschanoff when the latter offered to pay for the car.

"But I am not offering you any," Artschanoff said, "I only ask you to accept these four hundred roubles collected among the passengers for your political party as a token of sympathy."

"And do you know what party we belong to?" the young man asked, laughing complacently.

"To the Bolshevik," Artschanoff said. "Because it is the only party which can exist in Russia now."

The young man failed to see the irony, but was flattered and became more lenient.

"All right," he said. "I'll give you a receipt for the money. Our party does need means, what with educational aims we pursue and other expenses. I am sorry to say we can't give

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

you a luggage-van, we will chose you a car cleaner than the rest and which has not been used for the transport of cattle.”

The car turned out to be one which served for carrying coal. But such a small inconvenience as coal dust had to be overlooked and the passengers began to settle on their luggage.

All around was the noisy bustling crowd of soldiers. Cars were insufficient in number to carry them all and seeing that another car was being coupled to the train the men rushed towards it.

Sablin had got used to the soldiers' meetings and to the expressions they used at them during this year and a half of free republican life and remained perfectly calm, knowing that if this gang had no leader, the words and threats would not be carried out.

He was also not disturbed by the men filling the car and pressing and pushing the people who had paid for it. This was to be expected. The men travelled on the roofs of the cars and on the buffers, so naturally they would not let a car remain only half occupied.

XV

SABLIN having settled Maria Fedorovna and Olia as comfortably as possible sat down near the wall and, plunged in his thoughts, followed but vaguely the conversations and disputes which were going on in the car. He nevertheless had noticed at once a young soldier, dressed better than the rest, apparently a commissar or a member of a committee. He understood his importance at once and concentrated his attention on him.

The train moved; many dropped off to sleep, but Sablin remained awake.

He remembered all his life. He remembered Gritzenko's party in the spring, when he, a young lieutenant, had stood up for Zahar, when afterwards he had sung with Lubovin and when he had seen Kitty home. He was nearer to Zahar, to Lubovin and to the men of his platoon then than now when he had lived among them for twenty-five years. He knew better the feelings of his horses Leda and Diana, and of his Mira-

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beau whom he had mounted in the days of his youth, than the thoughts and feelings of these heavy-brained men.

He had lived with Kitty for a whole week, never leaving her for a minute. Even now he had but to close his eyes and a wave of voluptuous emotion would sweep over him at the remembrance of her lovely body and beautiful, fragrant arms. How many times had he kissed the nape of her neck with the perfumed waves of her golden locks caressing his face. And did he know or interest himself in what she thought or felt then? He had spoilt her life and he did not even know where she was now, and was she dead or did she still live.

And he remembered Marousia. He had never experienced such rapture in the love of any other woman. He had ruined her body and her soul. He had upset all her inner world. She had cried and suffered and he had experienced delight and enjoyment. And does the sight of human tortures and the slow death of a human being also afford delight? There were people who witnessed executions and who continually went to circuses to see tamers of wild beasts and the risky feats of gymnasts so as to be present at the moment of their destruction . . . and . . . to experience a thrill of delight.

"My prince! My prince!" the words reached him from afar.

All this had been! It had been and was no more. Lubovin had disappeared, as well as Korjikoff. And where was his son Victor?

He had seen non-existence engulf Marousia, but the others might still be living; only Sablin knew nothing about them and would he ever know anything?

'Tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse! . . .'

This gives strength, reason and the ability to live.

Everything passes! . . .

The little red spider who wriggled so helplessly in the small house on the Schlisselburg Tract had grown up. He must probably be the same age as that soldier over there. What a beautiful and delicate face it was and at the same time how repulsive, Sablin mused. "Why does he look at me so intently? Has he served with me somewhere? Who is he? A chauffeur? A

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

motor-cyclist? A radio-operator? A clerk? He has delicate hands, full of breeding, well-cared for, which so strangely recall other hands. Whose? Whose? There is something pleasant and nice in the severely knitted brows, which does not harmonize with his insolent bearing. Where have I seen him, where have I met him?

"What does he want? Why have armed soldiers, whom he beckoned gathered before the car? Why is he coming towards me?"

"Are you not General Sablin?" Sablin heard the question which was addressed to him and the voice which spoke sounded dull and far away. It was as if his ears were stopped with something, as happens when in deep diving water gets into the ears.

"Here it is," Sablin thought. "My turn has come." He thrust his hand into his pocket where he carried his revolver and by an imperceptible movement of his thumb slipped open the safety catch.

"It is you I am asking!" the soldier exclaimed wrathfully, stretching out his hand towards Sablin.

Everything had become intensely quiet: Sablin heard the drops of water fall off a twig onto the porous snow and penetrating it rustle on the dry leaves. One drop fell, and then another.

"Here it is!" flashed through Sablin's mind and his heart immediately told him: "Everything passes. . . ."

"Yes, I am General Sablin!" he said quite calmly. "What is it you want?"

He did not hear what the young soldier said to the group of men standing in front of the car, but he heard only that an odious, impudent calumny had been spoken, which the soldiers believed and that they would lynch him. Sablin knew the psychology of the crowd and of the soldiers far too well to be mistaken.

"Not everything is lost yet," he thought and pulling his revolver out of his pocket threatened the men with it and threw

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himself into the crowd. He was not mistaken. The crowd opened before him, no one snatched his revolver from him or caught hold of him. Sablin jumped adroitly over the ditch and started running, making wide jumps on the spongy snow.

Sablin was forty-four years of age, but he had practised sport all his life and had seen real service. He was strong and agile. He soon felt that the men who had started after him ran heavily and awkwardly and that they would not overtake him. The shots that were fired at him were fired without aim. Sablin did not even hear the buzzing of the bullets. He ran more quietly choosing his direction. He knew the men would not run far from the train and that he would be saved if the engine-driver started it.

But suddenly Sablin felt that someone had separated from the group of soldiers and was overtaking him quickly. Sablin understood that this one was as strong and agile as he himself, but younger. Ten, twenty jumps more and he would overtake him from behind and throw him down. Sablin was afraid to look round, but he instinctively knew that it was time to fire.

He stopped suddenly and, turning round, faced the man who was overtaking him. He lifted his revolver and took his aim. . . . A haze dimmed his sight for a second. Between him and the young soldier, who was overtaking him, a curious small cloud vacillated on the wet snow between the thin trunks of the poplars. In the fluctuating morning fog radiant blue eyes, large and sorrowful, shaded by long, dark lashes shone distinctly. A delicate, white face, perfectly bloodless, stood out against a background of long dark hair, falling down the back in curly waves; two delicate hands stretched out towards him and the cry of: "My prince, my prince!" came from afar.

The vision lasted but one second. Sablin had barely time to think "it is because I have been remembering Marousia. . . ."

But this second proved fateful for him.

A strong blow on his wrist knocked the revolver out of his hand. Heavy powerful hands weighed on his shoulders, caught hold of him, and he was surrounded at once by the whole crowd. He was pushed, his cap was knocked off his head. He was hit

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

so heavily on the neck that it made his ears ring and somebody's rough voice said laughing triumphantly:

"Into General Douchonin's Staff! . . ."

Sablin thought that an intense silence followed these words. The thin trunks of the poplars and the spongy snow were outlined indistinctly, as well as the light-blue sky which seemed sorrowful and weeping, seen in between the interlaced, dry twigs.

He thought he heard the branches rustle in the wind and murmur gently: "Into General Douchonin's Staff!"

He fully grasped the meaning of these words and looked about him with anguish.

Someone, who had just run up, dealt him a heavy blow on the nape of the neck with something hard, probably with the butt-end of a rifle. Everything grew dark before Sablin's eyes, he swayed and heard once more the triumphant, gay voice shouting:

"Into General Douchonin's Staff!"

PART VI

I

WHEN Sablin threw himself into the crowd of soldiers, revolver in hand, a commotion ensued in the car. All the soldiers, Nika and Pavlik, Polejaeff as well, jumped out and rushed after him. Nika and Pavlik did not know why they were running. They were without arms, being officers they ought to have feared the soldiers themselves, but they had a certain hope that they might be of use, might help and even save General Sablin. They saw him stop and take his aim. The whole crowd stopped too, except a young soldier who continued to run after him, always keeping his eyes fixed on him, like a greyhound pursuing a hare. The soldier with a pale and angry face, as well as a few of the men, started running from the sides. But Sablin did not fire, he lowered his revolver and at the same instant the crowd overtook him, and the Polejaeffs understood that all was over with Sablin. The attention of the entire crowd was taken up by him and no one heeded either Nika or Pavlik, who stood on the outskirts of the wood.

"Let us go with him," said Nika.

"We can't help him in any way," Pavlik said.

"We must find Olia and escape as quickly as we can. It is impossible for us to return to the car."

"But how? And he. . . . Can we desert him?" Nika said, his lips trembling and tears coming to his eyes. "Would it be right?"

They stood in the wood, their young hearts beating with indignation and helplessness. They felt a bitter shame at everything they had witnessed. A dull, fierce hatred for the soldiers filled their hearts, a thirst for vengeance, for a bloody, terrible vengeance was to be the chief aim, the chief wish of their life.

"Let us go to the south, to the Cossacks," said Pavlik. "There we will get arms and then we will go and deliver him."

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"Yes, if they will not kill him before that."

"Then we will avenge him."

"And what about Olia?"

"Of course she will come with us. As a Sister of Mercy. Where could she go? We have no home, no land, we must go to the Cossacks, it's the only thing which can save us."

They found Olia in the wood not far from the car. As soon as she saw them, she began waving them back, giving them to understand that they were not to approach the embankment, and she started towards them looking on all sides and hiding behind trees.

"My dear ones," she said, looking alternately at her brothers, as if wishing to convince herself that both of them were alive and unhurt. "Stop, stop, don't go any further."

She approached and began speaking nervously.

"We must not think of returning to the train. We must escape as far as possible. The old woman in the shawl and the wife of the telegraphist have betrayed you. They said that you also were with General Sablin. They called you his aide-de-camps. And where did they get it from? They grabbed and arrested the Kuban officer, his wife kneeled before them, imploring them to release him, but they seized her as well. The young soldier with the handsome face managed everything. The engineer who disputed with them yesterday, the lady who was with him and the stout Jew have also been arrested. They began searching the things. I had hidden in the wood and could see them tossing the empty bags on to the line. To return now would mean certain death. We must escape."

"But where to?" said Nika.

"To the south, to the south!" Pavlik said. "And without losing a single moment."

The sun shone over the wood. The brothers Polejaeff and Olia could tell the south by the sun, the tree trunks on which the snow had already melted and by the darkened sides of the hillocks. They pictured to themselves the south and the Cossacks as a blessed country of order, where the great Russian army was being reestablished, where the bloody haze did not

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float over the towns and villages and where red flags, inciting to mutiny and looting had not been hoisted. Their young hearts trusted firmly that Russia was still alive there, that she would rise to cast off the yoke of the violators, of the tyrants and traitors.

And so, to the south!

They started off avoiding the villages, keeping away from the main roads. They carried nothing with them except a small amount of money. Their luggage had been left in the train. But they did not mind the privations; they believed firmly that they would find Russia, that she would warm and feed them.

Towards evening with hearts full of hope they approached the first stanitsa of the Don. A Cossack passed them on horseback; he appeared to be an officer and was dressed in a rich fur coat and a large handsome papaha, at his side he wore a sword adorned with silver. He was accompanied by two Cossacks. They were also in rich fur coats, one of them was in a Cossack papaha, the other in a low beaver cap. The officer looked intently at the passers-by. He was dark and pale, with short, black moustache, a delicate nose and full, well-shaped lips.

Pavlik recognised him at once.

"Nika," he said, "that is Ivan Michailovitch Martinoff. Do you remember him? We used to meet him at the Lenitsins. He sometimes sang there and had a fine baritone voice. He is an officer of the Guard. This is a God-send. I'll go and look for him, we shall find out about everything from him."

"Pavlik, but if he . . . if he belongs to them?"

"What an idea! How could it be, Cossacks were with him. They belong certainly to Kaledin. We are saved."

But a certain feeling of cautiousness made them separate. It was decided that Pavlik would go alone and Olia and Nika would remain on the outskirts, near a corn stack.

"Have patience," Pavlik was saying. "I'll bring you bread and bacon, we will make you some tea, some hot soup. Ivan Michailovitch is a splendid fellow. He also knew Sablin well. Do you remember, Olia, how he made love to you?"

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

Pavlik had no difficulty in finding the place where the Cossack officer had halted. His elegant horse, and those of the two Cossacks, were tied up before a big house belonging to a wealthy Cossack.

Pavlik mounted the porch and stood dumbfounded. A white card was nailed on the door, bearing the following inscription in big letters: "Office of the Kamishansky Soviet of Workers, Red Soldiers, Peasants and Cossack Deputies,—the Commissar."

He was about to turn round and run away, when the door was thrown open and in the streak of light appeared one of the Cossacks who had accompanied Martinoff, with a paper in his hand.

"Whom do you want, comrade?" he asked, looking Pavlik over from head to foot.

"The Essaoul (Captain) Martinoff. I know him personally," Pavlik said firmly.

"Whom must I name?"

"Pavel Nicolaevitch Polejaeff," Pavlik answered boldly. He understood that he was lost, that boldness alone could save him.

Ivan Michailovitch was sitting in a well-furnished room at a table covered with a table-cloth and was eating. His face was lit up by a petroleum lamp with a porcelain shade. A bottle of vodka stood before him, plates with rich fish, herring, caviar and large pieces of bread were standing on the table, as well as a covered tureen. A young Cossack woman, tall, handsome and fair with long plaits of thick hair covered with a silk shawl, stood in the corner, leaning her chin on her white, plump hand.

"Polejaeff, Pavel Nicolaevitch," Martinoff said cordially. "How come you to be here? Sit down. You will be my guest. What has brought you to our part of the world? Praskovia Ivanovna, please try and find us another plate. There, Praskovia Ivanovna, you have told me that you had never seen a living 'bourgoui.' And here is one who has come to us himself. Look and admire. But I am only joking."

Martinoff poured Pavlik some vodka, placing the plate with the rich amber-coloured fish before him. He had changed but

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little since Pavlik had seen him in Tsarskoie Selo. He had only shortened his long, silky moustache and had shaved his small Mephistopheles beard, which made his face look rounder and himself stouter. He was well-dressed and the long fingers of his well-cared-for white hands were adorned with costly rings out of which one big diamond sparkled in the lamp light. Pavlik wondered mentally where these rings had come from? He knew that Martinoff was not rich, that he had been compelled to quit the guard after a story of some kind in connection with money difficulties. But Martinoff gazed at Pavlik with the same handsome, black eyes, shaded by thick, long lashes, and his gestures were full of their former frankness and the cordiality of a man who loves to entertain and to regale his friends.

"Well," said Martinoff, half closing his eyes and looking sharply at Pavlik, "you are making your way to Kaledin or to Alexeeff? Eh? Many of your kind are trying to get there. And what for? Pavel Nicolaevitch, I knew you when you were like that," and Martinoff lifted his hand a little above the table. "I also knew your sister, Olga Nicolaevna, and I know your brother well, and will tell you frankly that I love you all very much. Well, you are going to Alexeeff or to Kaledin. But who are they? Republicans! And I know perfectly well that you are monarchists. And to whom are you going? To the hirelings of the French, to those who sent the Cossacks and the Russian people to destroy their own brothers for French money. Here we have the authority of the workers and the peasants. Russia is here, and who is with you? I know positively that the Cossacks did not join Kaledin, and Alexeeff is followed only by military cadets, pupils of the military schools and a few officers. What are you planning? You are in the minority. First think it over. Russia numbered a hundred thousand officers, if not more, and out of them hardly four thousand have joined Alexeeff. And why? Because every officer, Pavel Nicolaevitch, is a monarchist, that is an axiom. And I am a monarchist, just as you."

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"But how," said Pavlik, "are Lenin and Trotsky also monarchists?"

"Who knows, who knows," Martinoff said, nodding his head. "We . . . do you remember how I once sang, I had even composed the melody myself: 'If we're lonely, we'll go to the Volga, if we're poor—we'll find silver and gold!' Pavel Nicolaevitch, is it fair that a banker, a wretched Jew, should possess wealth, millions, precious stones, gold, and I, who am an educated Cossack of the Don, clever, handsome, because I well know, Pavel Nicolaevitch, my own worth, have not a penny in my pocket? Why? The tables must be turned. The clever, the young and the daring, these are the ones the Bolsheviki are putting forward. Join us! Eh?"

Martinoff drank one glass of vodka after another and was getting tipsy. But drunkenness with him manifested itself in greater loquacity, in a sharper understanding, in an increase of friendliness and in still more ample gestures.

"Before deciding to join you," said Pavlik, "I should like to know more exactly who are the Bolsheviki. I had formed in Petersburg a rather different opinion of them."

"Praskovia Ivanovna, tell the 'bourgui' what the Bolsheviki are," said Martinoff addressing himself to the young woman.

"Oh, Ivan Michailovitch," the Cossack woman said, hiding her face shyly.

"Bolshevik means—everything is permitted," said Martinoff bringing his hand adorned with rings close to Pavlik's face.

"I examined the safes in Petrograd, and do you see what I received for it? By right too! By right of the strong, the dexterous, the intelligent. Look at Praskovia Ivanovna, she's a priest's daughter. In former times, we should have had to be engaged, and who knows whether her parents would have agreed. Besides, I am already married. But she loves me and has done so for a long time, and now since it has been declared that women are common property, my love is mine, by right of my looks. I understand bolshevism, Pavel Nicolaevitch, as the realization of one's will."

"So, Pavel Nicolaevitch, Mironoff, Commissar of the Don, is

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coming here tonight. If you like, I will introduce you to him, and you may stay with us. Mark my words, the month will not be out before we shall have swept Kaledin and Alexeeff out and the red flag of the labouring Cossacks will flutter all over the Don, from North to South. Kaledin still holds out only in Novotcherkask and only because no one attacks him. Think, comrade, power, wealth, a luxurious life, freedom, women—all will be yours if you join us. Mind you, I don't force you, —others kill such as you, but I give you a free choice. I allow you to go into the enemy's camp. You are hungry, tired, frozen, after your wanderings in the fields. I offer you the chance to get warm, to eat, and to rest. In the last few days it has been decided to start forming the Red army, we need instructors. Well! I am waiting for your answer."

"I cannot join the Bolsheviks," Pavlik said in a low voice. "They are German spies, they are traitors, no one has elected them, they have usurped the authority."

"Tales, Pavel Nicolaevitch, only bourgeois tales, lies and calumny. And even if it is so. Whom are you joining? In one case it is German money and in the other it is French—you are still not going to work for a Russian cause."

"Ivan Michailovitch," said Pavlik getting up. "You promised to let me go and I am going."

Both were silent for a few seconds. Martinoff did not take his eyes off Pavlik.

"Well," he said, "a long time ago I was in love with your mother. I was quite a young officer then. In her memory—go. Only go quickly. Mironoff is coming here tonight with his division and then you will not be able to escape. Praskovia Ivanovna, will you give my guest some bread, fish and bacon."

For five days after this took place Pavlik, Nika and Olia continued their march through the steppes during the nights, guiding themselves by the stars. Pavlik would find the Polar star, then turning round they would choose some object, a hillock, a tree or a hay-stack and they would move ahead as long as their strength permitted. They searched for the small huts used by the Cossacks during the summer field work, where

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they would shelter and hide in the old rotten straw, passing the day listening to what was going on in the steppe. In those days the lonely deserted steppe lived a peculiar life. Figures of mounted Cossacks were to be seen, driving before them horses, cattle and fowl. Heavy carts creaked, drawn by large grey oxen, the stanitsas and the small farms bustled with excitement leading an existence unusual for the winter season.

The supplies given by Martinoff were soon exhausted. They fed on crusts of old bread, obtained from time to time and on ears of corn. At last fatigue, hunger and cold compelled them to take the risk and enter a stanitsa. One dark night they knocked at the door of an isolated cottage. The words they heard in answer to their knock, uttered in an old voice, gave them hope that they might be spared a hungry death in the steppe. These words were: "May Christ save you!"

II

It is a lovely, sunny warm day and spring is in the air, the lark's gay song fills the azure vastness. It has frozen during the night, but now the wide, black road has thawed along the telegraph wires which disappear in the distance. The pools, as well as the deep wheel-tracks full of water, shine in the sun.

A line of people is advancing through the steppe, keeping to the road-side. They walk in columns, carrying their rifles smartly, keeping pace, dressed in grey shirts, with their army-coats rolled up and fixed in the old manner. Looking at them from a distance one is able to forget that a revolution has taken place in Russia, that the Double-Headed Eagle is overthrown, degraded and insulted, that officers are being killed, that the hearts of Russians are polluted and that the valourous Russian army is transformed into a crowd of dirty comrades "tovaristchi." This column is marching at such a fine pace, the bayonets are carried so regularly, the intervals are kept so exactly between all the platoons, the companies are so well picked, that the heart rejoices when looking at them.

It is not the old Russian song, the soldiers' song recalling the valourous deeds of forefathers and the Imperial glory,

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which rises from the centre of the column, but the new song, composed but lately, calling to glory and honour. It is not soldiers' rough voices which are singing it, but the voices of young people, who have a knowledge of music and who can render even a simple marching song musical.

Pavlik and Nika Polejaeff are marching in the ranks of the soldiers. They walk, swaying in time to the melody, and close to them is Ermoloff, in the place of the platoon commander. The wind-bitten, emaciated faces are full of determination and the eyes gaze unflinchingly and proudly before them. Not all the company is wearing top boots, many officer-soldiers are in puttees, many are those whose boots are torn, and their feet are wrapped up in rags. The regiment is dressed poorly, but neatly. Each buckle is in the right place and the lack of uniformity in the equipment is compensated by the correction of the military drill, the pace and the animation of the youthful faces. These are either experienced officers, who have had seven years drill in the military cadets' school and two years training in the military college, or cadets. If there is a yesterday's student among them, then he has also acquired the military deportment, considering military customs and obligations, including death and wounds, in the same way as the military cadets.

Behind the column, at a certain distance, appears the Russian flag, the Commander-in-Chief's badge. A tanned, emaciated man, with dark eyes burning with enthusiasm was riding on a cream-coloured horse. A stout General with grey hair and black eyebrows, rode wearily behind him on a small Cossack horse, wearing a grey, broad papaha, pressed in front in the Kabardins fashion. He looked lazily about him and, at times, a grimace of vexation contorted his pale handsome face. This was Denikin, Korniloff's right hand in the work of the organization of the army. He was the idol of the young officers, after his passionate, impetuous speech made at the officers' meeting in defence of the army and of the officers. A stout man in a short civilian coat with dark, shining eyes rode in Korniloff's suite: it was General Loukomsky. The picturesque, handsome figure of a young Tekinets, Korniloff's

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aide-de-camp, sitting erect in his variegated, national dress, with a turban on his head, stood out sharply among the grey army overcoats. Perfectly motionless in the saddle rode General Romanovsky, with General Bogaevsky beside him. He had a pale, pleasantly smiling face, with black hair and moustache. He was the brother of Mitrophan Petrovitch, the Don's wonderful speaker, who charmed the Don's Kroug and its Government by his beautiful, harmonious speeches. Korniloff was escorted by several officers mounted on horses of different colours; half a sotnia of officers closed the escort and several Tekintzi formed a handsome group. They rode straight before them, over the steppe covered with weeds at an easy canter, and their light, impetuous motion in the rays of the sun, incited the regiments to advance. Involuntarily all heads in Korniloff's regiment turned towards him, the young eyes shining with enthusiasm. "Our Korniloff!" passed in the ranks. He led them across the deserted steppes, as tribes and nations were led in former times, as the armies were led by the ancient heroes. He was Moses, he was Xenophon and scarcely could the Anabasis of the ten thousand Greeks in Asia Minor have been harder than this wandering of officers and children in the Pricaspian steppes.

Where was he taking them? And what for? In the declaration of the Voluntary Army which had just been issued, Korniloff writing about its fundamental problems said: "Those who realize what the expectancy of favours from the Germans involves rightly understand that we can be saved exclusively by keeping to our Allies."

The village captured by the volunteers was deserted. The cottages had a sorrowful aspect with their closed shutters and broken windows. Dead bodies of soldiers were lying about in the mud. It was strange to think that these Russian people, wearing all of them Russian army overcoats and grey fur caps, were enemies. About thirty of them were lying in a heap, evidently hit by the fire of a machine-gun. Twelve men, with red bands tied round their sleeves, were standing in the square near the white church apart from the large group of captured

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soldiers. They were commissars and communists. Yesterday but simple clerks and regimental musicians, today they were the leaders of the grey herd of soldiers, spreading the revolution and kindling the passions in view of achieving Russia's total destruction.

They were watched by four cadets and young ensigns, gazing at the prisoners with earnest, childish eyes, gripping their rifles firmly. They had captured them in the church where the communists had hidden, and after having disarmed them they dragged them out into the square. One of the Ensigns, called Losseff, had recognized his brother among the commissars. He was two years his senior and now kept looking at him with bewilderment, only able to murmur:

"Oh brother!"

"Well, what then, brother," the captured man answered with concentrated fury. "Are you satisfied, eh? Well, shoot your brother down, you hireling of the French capitalists. You are fighting for the landlords' estates! Yes, we both have indeed so much land, we could not divide it to our mutual satisfaction, and we started fighting."

"Silence!" a cadet shouted roughly coming up to Losseff. "I'll teach you to shut up, you Jewish sneak! I'll pierce your bowels with my bayonet."

After that Losseff kept a gloomy silence.

A young girl in masculine attire came galloping down the street mounted on a thorough-bred horse. Her pale face, with large grey eyes, set very close together, expressed unnatural animation. It was the Baroness Borgsten. Two months ago deserters had burnt her country home; they had tied her father to a plank and in her presence they had tossed him against the ground until he was dead and his eyes had rolled out of their sockets. She had also seen the soldiers torture and kill her mother and her twelve-year-old sister. She would have met with the same fate if German troops had not been approaching and the soldiers, taking fright, had not run away leaving her alive. She swore to avenge herself. She made her way to the Don and enlisted as a private in the ranks of the Voluntary

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Army. Daring, handsome, an excellent horsewoman, she soon earned the general esteem. No one knew her past history. Her hatred of the Bolshevik soldiers was considered as a mania. The volunteers admired her pluck and her cold-blooded indifference to danger. Whenever she happened to see grey overcoats without shoulder-straps, fur caps worn at the back of the head, fringes of untidy hair falling upon their foreheads, like those worn by women, Jewish individuals in officers' tunics with scarlet bands on their sleeves, a strange smile would contort her delicate lips, showing her teeth and giving her face a savage expression. Terrible reminiscences would flash through her mind. A superhuman passion would light up her grey eyes, and few were the volunteers who could gaze into them at such moments. The pupils would disappear almost entirely, leaving nothing but the grey iris, intensifying the internal fire burning in them. At such times her hands acquired a supernatural strength. Her horse feeling the harsh tension of her will became so docile that it understood her wishes by intuition.

At such moments Baroness Borgsten saw things which were invisible to others.

She rode up to the group of commissars at an easy canter and stopped her horse abruptly. The men who were on guard knew her.

"What are these beasts?" she asked.

"Commissars," a tall, lanky cadet answered her.

"Why have they not been shot?"

"I don't know," the cadet said gloomily. "Evidently there is no one to do it."

"You have heard Korniloff's order: 'The war is being carried on with the definite purpose of extermination. Either they will exterminate us, or we them.'"

"We have heard it," the cadet murmured lowering his eyes.

A rapturous expression of delight came to the Baroness's face. A smile of passion played on her lovely lips. She slowly and deliberately unfastened the heavy service revolver hanging on her hip, fixed it on to the holster, using it as a rifle and dropped the horse's bridle.

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The commissars watched her, their faces assuming an expression of bestial terror. They remained perfectly motionless under her gloomy gaze. The servants of the International could read their fate in her eyes, they, who but yesterday had martyred the priest in this very same village; cutting his stomach open, they had pulled out his bowels, nailed them to a telegraph post, and had chased and dragged him round and round until all his intestines were pulled out and he dropped down dead. They saw a superior force expressed in the intense brilliancy of the strangely contracted pupils.

"Please move away," the Baroness said to the sentries in a hushed voice. "Let God's justice be fulfilled."

Her words rung out distinctly in the big square, where in one of the corners the crowd of captured Bolshevik soldiers were talking noisily and they were carried over the stanitsa, in which separate shots were still being fired here and there.

The Baroness, without dismounting, her horse standing as a statue, slowly took her aim, all her gestures full of supple, feminine grace, and fired. The soldier who was standing the farthest from the Baroness, who had been staring at her with an expression of tense stupidity on his face fell to the ground without a groan. Deliberately, one shot followed another, until all the twelve men had dropped down dead.

The Baroness folded her revolver, hung it on to her belt, took up the bridle with a soft sigh as of gratified passion and looking with tired eyes once more round the Bolsheviks she had killed, rode away at a pace through the village.

III

THE Kornilovski regiment was passing through the stanitsa in the evening dusk. It was marching as usual in perfect order, but without singing. A Cossack cart was driving behind it; it was carrying Korniloff's body, enveloped in his military coat. A guard escorted the body.

Olia, who had just finished carrying the wounded out of the hut and had placed them on the cart, was waiting for the regiment to pass, intending to follow it.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

She thought the regiment seemed less numerous than before; its ranks were thinner; here was the platoon in which her brothers were marching, Ermoloff would surely be with them. But he was not there, her brothers were alone. Their faces were grey, with sunken cheeks and protruding cheek-bones. Rags were keeping together one of Pavlik's boots, which had quite fallen to pieces. They both kept their eyes to the ground, and did not see Olia.

"Nika, Pavlik!" Olia called out. "Where is Ermoloff?"

Pavlik glanced at his sister gloomily, as if not recognizing her and passed on. Nika stepped out of the ranks.

"Get ready Olia and start," he said.

"Where is Sergei Ippolitivitch?" she exclaimed.

"Why do you need him? We are all done for, sooner or later, it makes no difference."

"Nika, what has happened to him?"

"He is gravely wounded in the stomach. He could not have stood the driving and has been left behind. The inhabitants names have been taken down and they will answer for anything that happens."

"Where is he?"

"He is in the cottage of the Cossack Kravtchenko on the outskirts of the stanitsa Elisavetinskaya. . . . But what are you thinking of?"

"I'll go there."

"You are mad, Olia!"

"No it's you, who have left him, who are mad."

"But Olia, all the same, he'll die."

"The more so, he'll die in my arms. He will die without anger or hatred, blessing you."

"Olia I won't let you go."

"You won't dare stop me! Go, fulfill your duty to the end and let me do mine. I am a nurse before being your sister, and you are a soldier, a Kornilovets, before being my brother. Your place is in the ranks of your regiment, mine is with the wounded. I am a Russian girl, as you are a Russian soldier and we must know how to face death! Go!"

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Olia embraced Nika and kissed him.

"Give Pavlik my blessing," she said. "Father and mother are looking down upon us! They will pray for us and protect us. . . . Farewell my dear."

Nika followed the regiment, he stumbled and did not see the road under his feet. "Nothing matters now," he thought. "Korniloff is no more and we are doomed to perish!"

Olia went to Sister Valentine to tell her the decision she had taken.

"You are undertaking a noble deed," Sister Valentine said, unfastening the medicine-case. "Take these dressings and medicines," and she hastily tied the parcel up.

"And this," she said, giving Olia a small bottle, "is something in case you are threatened by the soldiers."

"Thank you," said Olia.

They parted simply, without any superfluous words, without tears. Everything was so insignificant, so small compared to what was taking place this lovely spring-night, with the new moon and the air so fragrant with the smell of the budding trees and of the damp soil.

Olia went along the deserted stanitsa. The inhabitants had hidden and the cottages could be seen behind the fences with their shutters tightly closed. Olia was the only one to hasten there, from where everyone was escaping. Many Cossacks were hurriedly loading their carts preparing to forsake the village, fearing a bloody revenge. Olia asked them to show her the Cossack Kravtchenko's house.

"Further, further down the street," Olia was told, "on the right-hand side, the second cottage from the end."

The new moon was already casting a bright light and the shadows of the budding trees lay on the ground. The street sloped down, the dogs she met did not bark, but ran away hiding behind the wickets.

A man with a bandaged head lay stretched across the road. It was a wounded man who being left behind, had shot himself. . . . Ermoloff was in the same circumstances.

Olia met some Cossacks who were carrying spades; they

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were probably going to remove the bodies of those who had committed suicide.

"Where is Kravtchenko's house?" Olia inquired.

"Are you going to the wounded?" one of the Cossacks asked, stopping.

"Yes, I am going to the wounded."

"There are two left, the third succumbed, he took his life. May God help you. You will see a light in the windows of the second house from here."

Two planks forming a path-way led across a small garden. The branches of a lilac bush brushed Olia's cheeks with their fresh delicate buds, which were yet without perfume. Olia mounted the steps of the porch, opened the door and entered the room. A lamp was burning on the table. An old Cossack and an old woman were sitting before it drinking tea. Two men were lying on some straw, which had been placed on the floor along the walls. One of them was moaning piteously, with his eyes rolled up in his dark face. He was unconscious.

"Hurrah!" he shouted on hearing Olia's steps. "Hurrah! we will all die, but we shall seize it!"

The second was Ermoloff. His face was white and strikingly clean in these dirty surroundings. A big soft pillow was placed under his head. He gazed at Olia with widely opened eyes, full of suffering. He was conscious and recognized her.

"Olga Nikolaevna," he said, trying to raise his hands, but they dropped down helplessly upon his coat.

Olia noticed that his wrists were swollen and that the bones stood out sharply, as well as the thin arms which were bare up to the elbows.

"We have been forsaken," he said looking around.

"My dear," said Olia, "no one has forsaken you, everything will be all right."

"Is it so?" Ermoloff asked peering into Olia's very soul.

"It's true, my beloved. All will be as God wills it."

The Cossack and the woman were looking at Olia.

"Have you come to say good-bye, Sister?" the Cossack asked.

"There you see," the old man said, beginning to fuss ner-

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vously. "It won't do, I tell you, old woman, it's not right. The Bolsheviks will come and then it won't do. We must hide them. Do you hear, old woman."

"But where shall we hide them?"

"Where! But in the barn, old woman. It's warm now and we will arrange for the Sister to be with them and we will hide them behind the things that are standing there. We'll bring them milk in the mornings and we will at least have saved Christian souls."

"Oh, old man, and if we have to answer for it."

"Shut up, shut up, mother, I tell you we will save them. Look at her, mother, she is young and beautiful and nevertheless she was not afraid for herself, she came here. And what are we mother? We are old. What do we need? And in this way we'll have saved our souls."

The whole night Olia and the old people worked arranging a corner for the wounded in the back-yard, behind the poultry and the sheds. They brought beds, mattresses, the old people willingly gave clean sheets and late at night, when the moon had set, the wounded were placed in the big barn, behind the thrashing machine and the ploughs.

Ermoloff had fever and his breathing was scarcely noticeable. The other wounded, a thirty-year-old Captain, tossed about moaning. He was continually delirious.

Olia, whose limbs ached with fatigue, came out of the barn. The air was fragrant and cool. The last stars were fading in the cold sky. A rosy mist was spreading over it. The air was full of the perfume of mint, of worm-wood and of black earth coming from the steppe. The trees stood motionless in the garden. The apple-trees were adorned like brides with delicate fluffy pink and white buds, casting a sweet penetrating perfume. Down below, in a green frame of winter-corn and willow-trees, flowed the wide blue ribbon of the Kuban. The birds sung lustily in the branches greeting the rising sun. The cock was shaking its feathers close by in the chicken-pen and crowing hoarsely. The cows could be heard breathing behind the wall and the bull snorted softly. All around were peace, wealth,

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joy and wide expanse. Mother earth in expectation of the sun was fertile and full of powerful, vivifying sap.

A solitary shot sounded in the hollow on the outskirts of the stanitsa. . . . Then another one. . . . Topsy voices were heard screaming and shouting. A dog, with its tail between its legs, came rushing past; it looked about frightened, unable to understand what was happening. The Bolshevik hordes were entering the village.

IV

SABLIN advanced stumbling over the roots of trees and stumps. He was pushed along from behind. Some of the men would get before him and he would feel their fetid breath on his face. His hands were caught hold of, his arms were pulled back and tied firmly with a handkerchief. Every moment Sablin expected to be shot at from the back and to be killed. Everything was being managed by a young soldier.

"Wait, comrades!" he shouted. "Wait! This is not a General who can be finished off at once. No, we will examine him and do the whole thing properly. Don't touch him! How dare you!" he shouted severely at a soldier with fierce, pale grey eyes, who was on the point of thrusting his bayonet into Sablin.

"Well, shall we watch over him? Shall we stand at attention before His Excellency?" asked the man, nevertheless drawing back and obeying the young soldier's words.

"It's not your business, comrade," said the young soldier, speaking with authority. "If I find it necessary you will stand at attention. General Sablin is my prey and I shall do with him whatever I see fit."

The thought that the young soldier wished to save him and was no enemy of his, but a well-wisher, came to Sablin for a moment, but gave him no happiness. "How can I live after the blows and the insults? What is there to live for? They are Russian people, Russian soldiers whom I loved so well," thought Sablin. "This is the Russian Army which was all in all to me."

"Gently comrades! It was forbidden even at the time of the Tsar's régime to insult a prisoner, and now, when it's the peo-

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ple's authority you must show your discipline. We alone have the right to judge him and know what tortures he deserves."

"Oh, you Commissar," drawled the soldier with the angry eyes.

"Yes and not only a Commissar but also a member of the Cik,"* retorted the young soldier speaking with dignity. "I will let Trotzky know if you behave roughly."

"We don't care a pin for your Trotzky! He is a Jew and a traitor," rejoined the soldier with the pale eyes.

"Comrade, it is your lack of education and your proletarian origin which allows you to speak in this way and this is why I don't take any measures against you. But mind you, this is already counter-revolution."

"Stop, comrade," said the soldiers. "Why quarrel, don't you know that he is a Commissar."

"The same masters as before, but cads," hissed the soldier, leaving Sablin alone.

He moved away, threatening him with his fist from a distance.

"You just wait," here he used a vile Russian curse. "You just wait, you only let the General go, I shall lynch you with my own hands."

"Don't you worry, comrade!" said the young soldier, such an evil smile contorting his face that Sablin understood he would not only have to face death, but also horrible tortures, and he mentally began praying.

They took Sablin to the train and placed him in a car with his hands tied back. Armed soldiers got in with him. The same Red Guard managed everything. The train moved immediately reaching a big station in twenty minutes. There Sablin was led out and taken to a second class compartment. Four armed soldiers got in with him; two of them seated themselves near the window, the other two near the door. The commissar occupied the neighbouring compartment.

"I suppose, Mr. General," one of the soldiers of the escort said, looking at him, "it must be hard to sit with your hands

* Central Executive Committee.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

tied back. Let me untie them. You won't run away, will you?"

"Do you believe," Sablin said looking the soldier straight in the face, "that I was capable of selling the position at the front for forty thousand roubles? Do you know me?"

"Yes I do. I served in your corps. We were all very fond of you."

"Then why should I run away? You understand yourself that it is only the man who has something to fear who runs away and why should the man who is innocent do so?"

"That's true," drawled the soldier. "But you don't know him . . . Korjikoff. . . ."

The blood left Sablin's face and he asked breathlessly—"Whom don't I know?"

"But the commissar . . . Korjikoff. . . . He is a terrible man. A demon. A few days ago he himself killed an officer. He noticed his shoulder-straps under his overcoat, came up to him, drew his revolver and killed him. He is a cruel man, Your Excellency. He is worse than a peasant, although he is of gentle blood. But what's wrong? Oh! how weak you are! Comrade, we ought to warm some tea for the General, see how weak he is!"

"It's the fatigue," his neighbour said, "and then also the agitation."

"And he probably hasn't eaten anything."

"Yes, we must feed him."

The soldiers placed the unconscious Sablin on the sofa and one of the men went to bring some boiling water and some bread.

Sablin travelled four days before he reached the north. He was in a semi-conscious condition. The men of the escort were relieved every day. They gave him tea and bread. Twice they brought him a thin, nasty soup. On the fifth day Sablin saw dimly through the half-frozen carriage windows the buildings of barracks, a canal under snow and he understood that he had been brought to Petersburg. He hadn't seen Korjikoff once during all these days.

"If I know who Korjikoff is," thought Sablin, "he probably

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does not know who I am and our relationship. If the red-haired socialist had told him the secret of his birth, he would have betrayed himself, and he did not say anything. . . . But then why had he not let the soldiers dispatch him 'to General Douchonin's staff' and why had he brought him to Petersburg?"

Sablin decided to be silent whatever might happen.

The train stopped at the Nikolaevsky station. It was about mid-day when Sablin was led out of the car and conducted through a dense crowd of soldiers and onlookers to the Znamensky square. A motor-car was awaiting them. Sablin was placed on the back seat, between two soldiers; several armed men stood on the steps of the car; Korjikoff sat down beside the chauffeur.

"What a dangerous animal they are conducting," thought Sablin. "How extravagant is the people's authority! At the time of the 'Tsarism' the criminal would have been led modestly by two escorts and now. . . ."

The car crossed the Lafonsky Square, entered a gate-way and drove in between immense piles of wood. A crowd of people in black coats was standing near the gate. They were armed with rifles of different makes and machine-gun belts were tied round them. An armed car, like a grey monster, was standing in the right side corner of the yard, a gun covered with snow looking out gloomily from its round turret.

A young man in a black cap, with dark hair falling down on to his brow, with a small moustache on a pale face, wearing a black student's coat, over which a richly decorated sword with a brand-new St. George's tassel was fastened, and armed with a revolver, approached the car and asked:

"Whom have you brought, comrade?"

"I am Commissar Korjikoff," the commissar answered proudly, getting out of the car. "I have brought General Sablin."

"You are expected Comrade," the young man said, bowing respectfully, and ran towards the high doors.

"Let them pass!" he shouted to the Red Guards, who were standing smoking at the doors.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

The Smolny Institute swarmed with bustling men armed from head to foot. Armed workmen, sailors and soldiers were hurrying up and down the wide double stairs and were bustling in the colonnaded hall. Women with bobbed hair, the majority of them young, in short skirts and fur jackets, many of them with revolvers at their waists, sat before small tables on the landings surrounded by sailors and Red Guards, examining the permits. Others with anxious faces, were hastening along the passages, carrying scraps of paper and disappearing into rooms in which typewriters were sounding. Two soldiers, escorted by sailors, were carrying a big basket full of fresh hot loaves. All these people were busy and preoccupied, but at the same time they were gay. The word: "Comrade" rang all over the building and sounded naturally and easily.

Several soldiers passed Sablin carrying a young fellow all bruised and covered with blood. Sablin thought he was dead. No one heeded him. A well-dressed young girl with an intelligent face, Sablin thought she must surely belong to a good family, was sitting before a table on the first landing. She stopped Korjikoff asking:

"Your permit, Comrade! To whom are you going?"

"It's Comrade Korjikoff with the captured General Sablin," said the young man in black respectfully, stepping forward. "He is bringing him to Comrade Antonoff."

"Room 37, Comrade."

Korjikoff began mounting the stairs.

The Smolny Institute with its wide passages and class rooms opening out of them to the right and to the left, full of soldiers, workmen and sailors, who were hanging about the corridors and staircases, reminded Sablin of the University during the interval between the lectures.

It was dirty everywhere. Papers were scattered about all over the place and the smell of untidy lavatories infected the air. Slips of paper were stuck carelessly on the glass doors and over them were the former inscriptions in golden letters:

"Dormitory," "The VIth Class."

Two guards were standing before the ex-room of the school

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mistress. They were both sailors. One of them had served in the former navy; he was about thirty years old, with a thin yellow face. The other one was a lad of about fifteen years old; his military coat hung awkwardly on him; a sailor's cap with a black ribbon, much too large for him, was pulled over his eyes.

They admitted Korjikoff quite easily.

"Let the General stay here," said Korjikoff.

Sablin entered a spacious room. It was already occupied by people of different standing and appearance. The room was untidy: straw, mattresses, pillows, old padded coats and parcels were scattered about on the floor, lying in the corners and along the walls. The air was damp and cold; it was heavy with tobacco smoke, with the exhalations of uncleanly human bodies and it smelt of stale food. It was evident that people were living, eating and sleeping here and that the room was but seldom aired.

Pieces of black bread were lying on the table, a big tea-pot, enamel mugs and glasses, with a muddy beverage smelling of rotten leaves, stood upon it. Thirteen people occupied the room, twelve men and one woman. The majority had probably in days gone by, been well-dressed, but at present their clothes were creased and dusty from lying on the floor. The shirts were dirty and many of the men were without ties. The woman was in a padded green jacket, which evidently did not belong to her, but her hair was waved and her cheeks, which were burning feverishly, were powdered.

"Professor!" exclaimed a young man who was standing at the corner of the table. His clean-shaven face and his whole body was twitching nervously. "Will you introduce us to the General?"

The one who had been addressed as Professor was a neat looking old man, with well-groomed grey whiskers and with a thin wrinkled face. He was dressed in a black morning coat, a crumpled shirt; and his well-worn boots had holes in them.

"Mr. General! Your Excellency," said he, speaking in a weak, refined voice, tears coming to his eyes. "You have joined the

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

forgotten one's. Let us trust that with God's help you will also be forgotten, because . . ." he faltered.

"Professor, don't trouble the shadows of the dead," said the young man. "We were forty-four people here. We came at the time of the great October Revolution, when the proletariat had carried off its victory. We numbered four generals, a Grand Duke, who occupied the neighbouring room, three deputies of the Duma, six members of the Constituent Assembly, six cadets, five officers, four students, five women students and eight people of various callings. We were accused of holding counter-revolutionary opinions, of sympathizing with Kerensky and of assisting his forces. The generals, the officers and the cadets were executed, some were removed to the Prison Kresty, others to the Fortress and we were left here. Professor name the bourgeois."

The Professor, who had mastered his agitation, began speaking once more:

"Your Excellency, your being a General upset me. I was frightened for you. I can't approve capital punishment. I have fought against it all my life. I have written strong pamphlets against it, and when Tolstoy wrote his article: 'I can't be silent' I acquainted the students with it and suffered for it."

"Do you know, General?" said the lady, speaking in a deep contralto voice, "the Bolsheviks offered him the job of an executioner, to finish off the bourgeois."

The professor winced.

"Let us go on with our subject," exclaimed the young man.

"General, you behold people with shattered nerves," said the Professor, speaking again. "People who are ill. You have come, so to say, to a ward of madmen. The young man over there, who twitches continually, is Soldatoff, the famous painter of the old school, you have probably heard about him. They offered him the privilege of becoming a futurist and painting placards in the railway carriages which were to glorify the advantages of the Soviet rule. The lady is the well-known pianist—Podlesskaya,—they both lived on what they earned, on what their heads and their hands gave them, and now their fingers

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are swollen with frost and their heads are benumbed by the cold of the cell."

"Sit down here, General, without further ceremony," said the lady. "I will give you some tea. You must be hungry and tired."

"Yes, I am tired," said Sablin startled by the sound of his own voice. It was so weak after the sleepless nights and the lack of food.

"Have some tea and then lie down and rest. We will dine afterwards. They don't feed us badly here, they even sometimes allow us meat; it is much better than in the Kresty. We will learn to know each other better later on. We are all of us decent people. In fact 'bourgeois!'"

Sablin sat down on the bench and was given a mug of tea.

After tea Sablin went into the next room, which had apparently been a lavatory of the smaller girls, judging by the washing-stands fixed low down. He put his coat on the asphalt floor, lay down upon it and soon sunk into a heavy, dreamless sleep.

At about eleven o'clock of the evening two Red Guards came to fetch Sablin.

"General Sablin, you are to be examined," shouted one of them.

"Farewell, dear General! God bless you!" said Mme. Podlesskaya.

Sablin rose and went out. The dinner, which had been really nourishing and plentiful, as well as the tea had strengthened him. His voice was stronger. His nerves were in a better condition. Sablin was conducted along a passage and led into a large room, probably a former class-room. It was devoid of furniture, a small table and a chair standing in the middle, a cupboard with old papers in one of the corners, were the only things in the room. The floor was dirty, covered with traces of muddy boots. A solitary lamp with a smoked shade was burning dimly over the table. The corners of the room disappeared in darkness. The cold winter night looked in through the big, many-paned windows. The sound of steps and the voices of people, who

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

never stopped bustling along the passages even at night, were vaguely heard. The Red Guards who had brought Sablin, stayed at the door while he came up to the table and sat down in the chair.

V

A QUARTER of an hour passed. A clock in the passage struck eleven. The Red Guards stood near the doors, leaning on their rifles and at times sighed heavily. They were ordinary Petersburg workmen with gloomy faces, one of them was clean-shaven, the other had a bristly red moustache.

A small man entered the room hastily. He had an ugly clean-shaven face; he was badly built, had long arms, like a monkey's and very short legs. He approached Sablin with determination and stopped beside the table. Sablin looked up at him.

"You are in our power, Your Excellency," he said. "We may do with you whatever we choose."

He stopped speaking, as if expecting Sablin to protest, but Sablin remained silent.

"Anything, anything we like, kill you if we want!" shouted the little fellow, pulling at his red curly hair. "But we may also pardon you, we may bring you to a height which you had not reached even at the time of the Tsar's Government. It's true that you did what you liked then, now you will have to serve us and we will watch closely that you do not betray us. We won't promise you not to hang you by mistake, but we will promise to execute you mercilessly if you betray us. You are accused, Your Excellency, of trying to get through to the Generals Alex-seieff and Kaledin, so as to take part in the struggle which is being carried on against the authority of the Soviet. This accusation is so well founded, that any further inquiry is unnecessary."

"I don't deny it," said Sablin quietly, looking the small, badly built fellow over from head to foot. "I was going to join the Ataman of the Don Kaledin and to assist him in his sacred struggle for Russia's freedom."

"Well you see, you went quite uselessly. Ataman Kaledin

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shot himself the 30th of January. He understood that he was going against the people's will, that he had been a tool in the hands of foreign capital and he committed suicide. The working Cossacks authority is established on the Don. Soviets are on the Don. Resistance is useless, Your Excellency. Ataman Doutoff is defeated and is surrounded at Orenburg, Alexseieff has fled from Rostoff. The entire nation has recognized the authority of the peoples' commissars, the only lawful authority after the Tsar's."

"You consider the authority of the Tsar a lawful one?"

"Absolutely. I served in His Majesty's secret police. But when the Emperor abdicated, Your Excellency, the Temporary Government was compelled to seize the authority. The only elected authority which is a lawful one is the Soviet's. No one recognized Prince Lvoff and even Kerensky, notwithstanding his great popularity with all the classes of society. Everyone acknowledged Lenin."

"Did you call me for an inquiry or for an accusation?" interrupted Sablin.

"Neither for one, nor for the other. I have been ordered to transmit you the flattering offer to join the revolutionary military soviet and to assist us by your experience as a specialist to form a people's Red Army."

"Are you a socialist?" said Sablin.

"Yes, we are Bolsheviki, we are Communists."

"Then what do you need an army for? The doctrine of socialism denies the army, discipline, chiefs."

"Quite right. But circumstances don't allow us to carry our doctrines out in full regularity. English and French capital have risen against us. They are forming numberless bands of white guards and the achievements of the revolution are in danger. We must render the whole nation capable of defence, we must militarize the country. We well know Your Excellency's talents. I am charged by the Soviet of the Peoples' Commissars and specially by the President of the Revolutionary Military Soviet, Trotsky, to offer you a high military post in the people's Red Army. I don't know what post it is, but that's

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a detail. Maybe that of Minister of War or Commander of the Front, but not a less important one."

"May I see Comrade Trotsky?" Sablin asked.

"What for?"

"To strike him in the face for his vile offer!" exclaimed Sablin in such a thundering voice that the guard woke up with a start.

"Oh, Your Excellency, Your Excellency!" said the little man shaking his head. "I am the more sorry for you as I have heard so much that is said in your favour." A handsome sailor entered the room. He was very tall, well built, muscular and strong. His black hair waved naturally and a few curls fell on to his forehead and on to his brows. His large eyes looked straight before them. He wore a black tunic of the guard, without shoulder-straps and trousers tucked into smart boots. His broad, handsome face was bold and daring. He approached the little man, saying: "Well, comrade Andrei. Have you convinced the General?"

The other one shrugged his shoulders.

"Mr. General," said the sailor, and Sablin could feel the smell of good wine. "Agree without hesitating. In the first place, there is the ideal: the entire authority to the Soviets, to the Russian people. It also means: entire—undivided! The Jews won't always govern us, a day will come when we will take the upper-hand. And besides I must tell you that I have much success among women. And we would procure you such lovely proletarian girls! The army will be a real one; blows will be permitted and all the rest as long as it is not counter-revolutionary. Yes, Mr. General, I highly recommend you to agree!"

"I will go and report your decision to the Soviet," said the little man. "You have not changed your mind?"

"Oh, Mr. General—change it. I am sorry for you. There will be but one choice left; either backwards or facewards, but any way to the wall! . . . The choicest elements of Russia are perishing. All through sheer obstinacy."

"I have given you my answer," muttered Sablin, setting his teeth.

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"All right, I will report."

The little fellow went out together with the sailor.

Sablin began pacing the room. He stopped at the window. It looked out on a garden; old limes and oaks, covered with hoar-frost extended their crooked, black branches powdered with snow. Deep snow-drifts lay in it. The lights in the small windows of the houses on the Ohta twinkled dimly, and on the other shore, beyond the wall with its stone pavilions, stretched the white Neva.

"If I were to smash the window and throw myself out onto the snow there might be a chance of not being killed, but what of it," thought Sablin. "A wild chase, once more yells, shots, blows and insults! . . . Christ suffered and he bade us do the same." Sablin remembered the lessons of his old nurse and turned away from the window.

Sounds of heavy boots and the noise of rifles were heard in the passage. A detachment numbering about twenty sailors entered the room in a disorderly manner, and surrounded Sablin. A red-haired Jew followed them hastily. He was in a military tunic and top-boots. He carried himself very straight and his head was thrown back. His little beard stuck out forward and he wore spectacles on his thin nose.

"General Sablin," he said in a tone of authority. "You refuse to place your knowledge and your experience at our service. It means you are not sufficiently ripe yet. Hunger will teach you. When you will have been selling newspapers in the streets, when you will have served as a porter, when you will have visited every bank seeking for a penny-worth employment, when you will know misery—then it will be easier to deal with you. To the Petropavlovskaya Fortress! To the Troubetskoy Bastion! Until further orders!" he shouted angrily. And before Sablin had time to say anything the Jew had left the room with quick firm steps.

The same night Sablin was removed in a motor lorry to the Petropavlovskaya Fortress and cast into solitary confinement in a small, two-storied house situated behind the mint.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

VI

AT the beginning of his imprisonment Sablin expected his death warrant every hour. He listened to the steps sounding in the passage and prayed God to grant him the strength to face death bravely. At night the smallest noise would make him start. He drove away sleep and walked up and down his cell. The small barred window was faintly visible. The noise would cease and not one single sound of the outer world penetrated into the cell. Sablin pined tediously until the morning. He thought he heard shots, the noise of motor-cars, shrieks—and the minutes dragged like hours. The pale dawn came at last, the lamp was extinguished, a bluish light stole through the window, bitter cold stiffened the limbs of the weary body. No one came to fetch Sablin. He continued to live. Days and weeks passed in this manner.

Sablin often thought how he had gazed at this very fortress from the windows of the Winter Palace's Hall and dreamed of ghosts coming out of it. He had strolled with Marousia along the quay opposite and she had been indignant and had pitied those who were cast in its dungeons. Sablin remembered what he had read and what Marousia had told him of the last hours of the prisoners who were sentenced to death. How little it resembled this which was happening to him. Then there had been a trial, followed by a verdict, announced with certain pompousness. The criminal knew that he would be executed. He could hope to be pardoned but this hope was but a feeble one. Now there were no trials, verdicts existed no longer and Sablin could only suppose that he was doomed to die. In former times the man who had been sentenced was surrounded to a certain degree by comfort. He was decently fed, he was given books and the Bible. Before the execution the priest visited him and he was hung after a great many formalities had been strictly followed, which were certainly painful for the criminal. Still the ceremony of execution was not devoid of a certain degree of Christian Charity. All, from gaolers to executioner, the priest, the prosecutor, the officer in command of the sentries

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were kind to the condemned man. They executed the criminal without anger and hatred, fulfilling their duty. The sentries stood silently at the cell's door and did not insult and poison the condemned man's last moments. The criminal could not but feel that these people had personally nothing against him, the law had condemned him and the Sovereign alone could pardon him. The entire burden of authority reposed on the Sovereign. Perhaps it was out of the intricate experiences of these victims sentenced to death and deserted in literature that a feeling of hatred developed and grew in certain circles of the Russian public against the Monarch and the Tsar's authority.

Silence reigned in the criminal's cell. His food was delivered at regular hours, the prosecutor listened to what he had to say on definite days, and a priest visited him. There was the horror of solitary confinement, which sometimes deprived the prisoners of their reason, but there was not that which Sablin experienced.

He did not know whether he was in solitary confinement or was simply living in the Fortress. All depended on the guard, on the soldiers. At times the door of his cell would be thrown open and soldiers of the guard would rush in. They would insult him roughly and curse.

"You damned bourgeois! You won't cast off your fine manners, you scoundrel! Wait a moment, we'll finish you off!" They would yell at him, they would aim at Sablin, they would misbehave themselves in his cell and then the entire, noisy throng would leave him alone. There was no one to whom to complain and it was also perfectly useless.

And on the following day—the doors of the cells were opened and all the prisoners were allowed to assemble, to become acquainted; they conversed freely, scolding the authority of the Soviets and the soldiers would join them.

Besides Sablin, was imprisoned with him in the same building an old General aide-de-camp of the Tsar. He had become quite childish from all he had lived through. He longed to write his reminiscences. There was also a member of the State Duma, a fidgety, nervous individual, certain of being liberated.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"The most important thing, gentlemen," he said, "is to remain fit under these conditions. Physical exercise is absolutely necessary."

He heated all the stoves of their building, swept the floors in the cells and the passages and did all the heavy work. He was old and weak and dropped from fatigue.

"That's nothing," he would say. "That's only my body. But my spirit is strong. I can still spit all my hatred into the Jews' and violators' mugs."

A maid of honour of the Empress occupied one of the cells. She was sick and knelt in prayer for long hours at a time never coming out of her cell even when her door was opened.

Scarcely any news arrived from outside. They only knew what the sentries told them. The soldiers spoke of the war in the interior of the country, of the victories over Koltchak, over the Cossacks of the Don and over Denikin. But the fact that the sites of the victories were drawing always nearer Moscow made one think that they were not so important. But one spoke more of food rations, of bread, of speculation, of boots and of overcoats.

The following day freedom would come to an end. The new guard was exceptionally severe, threatened to shoot the prisoners, rapped the floor with the rifles; and dead silence would reign in the prison.

The food was very poor. At times they received no food at all, at others an evil smelling grey soup would be brought and a yellow tepid beverage, bearing the name of tea.

The body melted from such food. Terrestrial thoughts and desires vanished. The first day's hunger made Sablin think about nourishment; he remembered the luxurious meals in his mess and at his home; he pictured to himself the table covered with different kinds of vodka, with zakouska, the big pies filled with fish, the varieties of soups and meats; then he ceased thinking about food and it all dropped away. He was happy to feel that he did not lose his nerve, that his soul was strengthened by the knowledge of its everlasting life and his forthcoming death did not frighten him.

TO RED FLAG

At night Sablin frequently heard the noise of a motor lorry. People would fill the passages, lamps would flare up, abuses, implorations and moans were heard. Screams of despair filled the air, someone was being brought, someone was being led away, a car throbbed noisily and it seemed, or maybe it really was so, that sharp piercing volleys could be heard above the noise of the motor.

Next day the soldier fulfilling the duties of jailor, on bringing the bread and jug of water, would say sorrowfully: "Yesterday twenty-seven people were executed."

One night a barefooted man, wearing nothing but his underwear was thrust into Sablin's cell.

"Stay here, meanwhile," said the soldier, pushing him in.

He was a youth, with a pale, intelligent face and large eyes. He was trembling all over. The cell was cold and damp and he had nothing besides his underwear. Sablin threw his coat over him and put his arms around him to warm and quiet him.

This unexpected caress totally upset the young man and he began sobbing.

"Save me, save me!" he said, pressing Sablin's hands. "They will kill me! I know it, I know it. I have been taken because I wanted to escape. I have been charged with desertion. Save me. My mother will go mad if she knows it."

He mentioned a well-known name of the aristocracy.

"My mother is in the Crimea, she is expecting me. . . . Save me. . . . I will do everything, everything . . . if only I could live. Do you understand. . . . I am ready to bow to them. Oh! If only I could live—live. . . . I have a fiancée! Save me. . . ."

The door of the cell was opened and a soldier called out the young man's name.

He pressed against Sablin.

"Well be quick. We have no time to fuss with such as you! Hurry to the wall!" shouted the soldier and suddenly the young man rose, stepping awkwardly with his bare feet on the stone floor, and obediently complied with the soldier's orders. There was something so ghastly in the movements of this young body

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

clad in white, moving across the cell, in the faded eyes, in the humble obedience to the call, something recalling the pitiful submissiveness of an animal, that Sablin never forgot and continually dreamt of the young man dressed in white, leaving the cell with bowed head.

Since the autumn of 1918, Sablin's cell had been frequently in charge of a man with intelligent, thoughtful eyes and a high forehead. His clean-shaven face was thin and nervous. His eyes penetrated to the depths of the very soul and he was subject to two different frames of mind. One, when he would sit in a corner, perfectly silent for several hours at a time, moaning gently, the other one of great excitement—then he spoke, continually gesticulating and relating past events. He used to come to Sablin's cell and sit on a stool in a corner for several hours either silent or talking volubly.

Their acquaintance had begun on one of his visits to Sablin's cell, on a day when he had obtained the permission to shave and have his hair cut. After that Sablin was sitting on his bed, feeling fresh and clean, lost in thought.

The man on duty entered the cell accompanied by the sentry, glanced at Sablin and having said :

"What a typical bourgeois" went out of his room. An hour later he came in once more and sat down on the stool opposite Sablin. He sat with his back to the high window with Sablin facing him.

"You were not offended?" said he.

Sablin was silent.

"You don't answer me? I am a commissar and a member of the Extraordinary Commission for fighting the Counter-Revolution! . . . But on the whole it does not matter, I am just such a bourgeois as you are. You attracted my attention, because you are insulted and mocked at by the comrades, probably you are sentenced to death, you are not fed, you are devoured by lice and nevertheless you remain a gentleman. You are a born gentleman and you will probably die as a gentleman. And they—although super-men, are nothing but cads. You are silent? Well don't speak, don't speak. I quite understand, you

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loathe speaking to me. The more so as I am an educated man. I am a doctor of philosophy. Do you know, that my profession is law; I have been a prosecutor and particularly I have studied the question of criminal punishment. Was it moral or immoral? Admissible or inadmissible? and if yes, then how was it to be carried out?

“Well at first I came to the conclusion that naturally it was inadmissible. And I was extremely puzzled and fussed about it. Do you remember Andreieff’s ‘The Seven Men Who Were Hung’—a fine subject. Don’t you think so? Well, later on I read his ‘The Governor.’ I understood that it is a case of war. If they were not hung, they would kill him. How could one speak of abolishing capital punishment? Then came the war and all the rest of it and later Lenin seized the authority. I had edited a paper with him once, so since then we are friends. He has a brain! Believe me, he is a genius. Every word of his is a revelation. And I must own that the question of criminal punishment worried me. How could freedom and all the rest, individual liberty and criminal punishment go together.

“So I went to see him. He received me, listened attentively to what I had to say and then told me: ‘But, comrade, criminal punishment does not exist in reality.’ How not. . . . And the executions? And the tortures? But Lenin smiled his gay smile and said: ‘You don’t understand. Criminal punishment is a rite. It’s torture, it’s agony. Trial, prosecutors, priests, hangmen—it is even said that in former times the executioners were dressed in red shirts and red caps—there is a flavour of inquisition about it. This exists no longer. But, understand, we don’t want certain people and they must be removed. Study our way of governing and you will see that criminal punishment is abolished.’ I was appointed to the Extraordinary Commission. What a change in my way of living! I had been feeding in communistic eating-rooms, eating horrid fish soup, and bread made of peelings of potatoes, and now: I have my own cook and she turned out to be an aristocrat; I have wine on my table and bread. Yesterday we ate ice cream. My wife and my children are pleased.”

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

He stopped speaking, his animation had vanished and he added in a listless voice: "You are listening and think that I have come here to make you betray yourself and then denounce you. Well, you are right. Everything is carried on here in this way. It is the first time that I speak frankly. Because even at home though you eat ice cream and in the evenings play cards, you can't tell your thoughts to your wife or your son, because they may betray you. The position is awful. I don't know whether you will understand it?"

He went out, but came back five minutes later excited and animated.

"You attract me. I looked into your large, grey eyes and understood that you are a true bourgeois—you won't betray me, won't denounce me for a piece of fish or for a considerate word of the commissar; and although my cook is an aristocrat she is quite ready to kiss my hands, she is broken down nervously and is hysterical. She is mad about men and is ready to betray at any moment for a word of love. I know you would like to kick me out, but dare not do so."

"It is not that I dare not throw you out, but that I can't," Sablin said. "In any case you will refuse to obey me."

"Well, and maybe I should obey you. I am a considerate man," the commissar answered.

"The subject you have touched upon interests me and has always interested me," Sablin said.

"Criminal punishment! Well, I should say so! I understood the whole thing in the Extraordinary Commission. Have you ever been in a slaughter house? It is a horrible sight, but it revolts no one. Young girls of refined society even go there to drink hot blood, which is supposed to cure anaemia. The slaughterer is considered a decent man and no one shrinks from giving him the hand. His work is considered unpleasant, but necessary and he most decidedly is not an executioner. Well, anyhow, roast beef, beef steaks and the like are worth something. So Lenin ordered that the same thing should be applied to human beings. There must be no sentimentality about it. If you like, there is something of the Talmud in this

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conception. In the Hebrew's opinion the Gentile is not a human being but an animal, so Lenin gave us, the Extraordinary Commission, directions that all the former bourgeois nonsense: the prosecutors, the trial, the priests, the hangmen must be done with. The individual must be simply removed, destroyed and there is an end of it. Then someone had the idea of utilizing the bodies. They decided to use the flesh of the criminals they had executed and can you imagine, the Chinese proved themselves to be masters in this work, and I used to go wishing to know how the thing was done.

"Picture to yourself a motor-garage on the Gorochovaya with a concrete floor and with a spout in the corner near the wall. They were brought into the garage in the night. It was half dark. Two old lamps were burning dimly. The Red Guards stripped the prisoners naked. Clothes and underwear are as valuable now as the skin of an ox. They stood naked and shivering, many of them were so cold and felt so ashamed that they didn't think of death. Others were crying, crawling about on their knees, kissing the soldiers' hands. Then came an agent of the Tcheka.* And there are lovers of this kind of thing. Of course he was under the influence of some sort of narcotic, cocaine or ether. His eyes were shining, his nostrils palpitated. He was dressed in leather from head to foot. A black leather cap, called commissarka, with a big red star was on his head and he wore a leathern jacket. Trotsky himself wears one, then leathern breeches and high boots. A big revolver hung at his side, with ten or eight cartridges. His aspect was self-pleased and insolent."

"Place the bourgeois to the wall!" he shouted. "They may stand as they like, with their faces or with their backs towards it. I don't mind."

"And a row of trembling, naked bodies was lined along the wall. . . . Yes. . . . Have you seen the picture of the German painter Stook? . . . Or those of our amateur Decadents. . . . Oh, God! How hideous the human body is. Large, puffy

* Tcheka—the Extraordinary Commission.

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stomachs, thin legs, long arms and all that dirty, smelling badly. The agent approached the group and shot some in the temple, others in the back or the head. He did it so quickly. . . . It was quite like the slaughter house."

The man ceased speaking and left the room once more.

"Excuse me," he said coming back, "but I can't relate anything without taking cocaine. I have had some more. That time I stayed to the very end studying the new methods. And you know, Lenin's insolence and intelligence are amazing. Formerly at the time of the guillotine, the gibbet and the executioners—there were heroes. Louis the XVI and Marie Antoinette were heroes. Rissakoff and Geliaboff and Lieutenant Schmidt were also heroes—their bodies were searched for, honoured, civil funerals were organized. Now there are no more heroes either of the revolution or of the counter-revolution, merely cattle for slaughter. I believe they finished off all the thirty prisoners in five minutes time. And it was then that Chinese came and began carving the bodies of the dead. They worked just like butchers. They chopped off the heads, the arms, the legs, disembowelled the stomachs, put everything in iron boxes, then began cutting the remains into pieces. I watched them work. The pieces of flesh looked like ordinary meat. They took it to the Zoo to feed the beasts. Is it not clever? The complete destruction of the individual. The Government of the Tsar hung Kaliaieff, shot Schmidt, but their memory lived, and here try and find out, who or how many were executed?

"I came out of the garage. It was a pale Petersburg summer morning. I was born in the city and I love the melancholy white nights, the pale sky behind the steeple of the Admiralty and the fresh odour of the royal Neva. You can't think of another term than royal, although it is counter-revolutionary. Well, I came out into the street and there were five or six women standing about, some of them old, others young.

"Mr. Commissar!" they cried. "We know that all is over. Give us the bodies! Give them, that we may bury them. I am a mother. . . . I a wife. . . . I a sister. . . . I a daugh-

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ter. . . !” It was awful! . . . Lenin has planned the whole thing wonderfully. Go and get a hero’s body out of a panther’s or hyena’s stomach? Well, now you see the difference there is between the imperial Christian system and our communistic one?

“I heard that in the days of famine the Chinese used to sell this flesh in the markets. And now I never eat meat. The sight alone makes me sick. I abhor the smell of it. But I cannot help approving the system. It is a complete annihilation of the personality. They are cattle and not human beings. . . . Forgive me, for having fatigued you but I have eased my soul. I fear to speak frankly at home. I have a son, Arkashka. He is fifteen years old. He delivered his cousin, a cadet, to the Tcheka and told them that he was hiding at his aunt’s. He did it for a box of old sweets. I suppose he would not shrink from betraying me also. He grows up in the new ideas, which consider humanity as cattle. . . . The beggar is waiting for the new crematorium to be finished; he wants to see through the glass how the bodies are consumed, ‘I know father,’ he tells me, ‘that there is nothing, neither God, nor soul; the State has invented it all to keep the people in darkness.’ Eh, what do you say of such a young animal? He would betray his father quite easily. He belongs to the present generation. He worships Lenin. Excuse me for telling you all this, but I see you are a man of the past, a real gentleman. You won’t betray me, and I had to give vent to my feelings and thoughts.”

The commissar, who at times came to see him, the Red Guards, the old General aide-de-camp and the other prisoners, all seemed unreal to Sablin, to be visions of a terrible nightmare. Real life could not admit of such faces and such stories. The commissar, with his shattered nerves, saturated with cocaine, was not sane. He lived plunged in his visions, which were horrible, bloody dreams. Sometimes he brought Sablin newspapers. But it was unpleasant to read the illiterate articles of the “News” and the “Red Paper.” Sablin asked for a Bible and for books, but the commissar only shook his head saying: “That’s impossible. You understand if I allow it, I myself

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may be stood against the wall. The prisons have outlived their time, together with the bourgeoisie. My chief, Dzerjinsky has said: 'The proletariat does not need four walls, it will know how to manage with one.' But probably there will soon be a change for the better in your fate."

And it really was so: with the beginning of winter Sablin received a bigger ration of bread, meat-soup, and a barber was admitted once a week into his cell. He was given clean underwear a mattress and a quilt and he received a big parcel of books from an unknown quarter. They were all on military subjects. Bonch-Brouevitch's tactics, military administration and the army regulations. A large envelope was placed in one of the books. It bore no inscription but proved that someone was thinking of Sablin outside. The parcel contained money and a letter from Tania. It was an old one. The parcel had been lying about for a long time, it was covered with mildew and the inscription in pencil was quite faded. Sablin could not make it out. He opened the parcel and took out several sheets of paper, covered with his beloved daughter's delicate handwriting. The top of the first page was marked with a cross with eight ends and under it stood the following words: "The Lord has willed to put an end to the lives of the Saintly Imperial Sufferers in the night of July the 4th, 1918."

The letter went on to tell at length the story of the months, of mistreatment and the final butchery. The last words were:

"Papa, I pray for you and I think about you. I have no one and nothing besides you!

Your Tania."

VII

ONE dark night in the middle of the winter Sablin was wakened by a detachment of sailors headed by a youthful commissar. He did not know exactly when this happened, because all his efforts to mark the days and the dates had been useless.

"We have come to invite you to a new lodging," the commissar told him.

Sablin was familiar with the particular humour and wit of

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Soviet officials, who invented all kinds of different names for capital punishment and he thought that they had come to execute him. He began to dress, hastening involuntarily.

"Don't hurry comrade, we will wait for you," said the young man lighting a cigarette. "We have been ordered to bring you to the Gogol street, to your own apartment."

Sablin did not believe the commissar. He put on his creased shabby overcoat and went out surrounded by the sailors. The frosty air dazed him. His feet were freezing in his old boots. He drew a full breath and not having been out so long it made him feel giddy. He lifted his head: the stars were shining brightly in the dark sky and the moon was visible behind the Cathedral. How lovely life was!

A motor-car stood waiting before the door. Sablin was placed on the back-seat and the commissar sat down beside him, the sailors placed themselves on the steps of the car, which drove out of the fortress, jolting over the stones.

They turned on to the Troitsky bridge and Sablin beheld the Neva. The lamps were not burning on the bridge, nor in the rest of the town, which was plunged in darkness. There was no light in the windows of the palaces and of the houses along the quay and the other shore stood out in a dark line against the clear sky and the snow-covered Neva. The bridge was empty, neither carriages, cars nor foot-passengers were to be seen and there was also no militia, police or sentry of any kind. The town seemed dead and forsaken. It was difficult to realize that this was the same Petersburg in which Sablin was born and had grown up, in which he had lived gaily for so many years and which he loved so dearly. He had left the city living a nervous busy life; he had rushed through it when patrols were guarding the streets, when bon-fires were lit at all the corners and the town lived an anxious life, full of fear and danger. It was only a year ago. The spring in which he had been arrested by the soldiers and had tried to escape through the forest with snow sinking softly under his feet was a thing of the past, as well as the summer, the coming of which he only knew by the heat in his cell and by the increased fetid odour of uncleanness

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

and decaying bodies which came from the yard, by the moaning of the wind at nights and by the splashing of the waves. Then winter came once more. Judging by the scarcity of the snow and by the black holes in the ice it was the beginning of winter.

How gay it had been in Petersburg in by-gone days on the Troitsky Bridge. It was animated even in the late hours of the night. . . . And now? A dead town lay before Sablin.

The car rolled along the quay passing before the sleeping palaces. Their doors were locked, their windows nailed up with planks, their panes having been broken and the palaces stood gloomy and bare. A sentry from an infantry regiment of the Red Army was walking up and down before the Winter Palace in which all the windows had also been smashed. It seemed as if the commissar's words were coming true: Sablin was really being taken home.

The car halted before the gates. The sailors knocked for a long time on the doors and an old man came out whom Sablin did not know. On seeing sailors he uncovered his grey head, bowing with servility.

"Sablin's apartment," the commissar said curtly.

"Please come in, comrades," the old man answered politely, speaking in a trembling voice and leading them up the back stairs.

Sablin thought that had he possessed his former strength he could have snatched the rifle from the sailor who was walking behind him and could have killed them all, and if it were his fate to die by the hand of his country-men he would at least die fighting. But he was so weak that he would probably not have been able to hold the rifle. His legs trembled and refused to obey him and there was a buzzing noise in his ears. He understood now why the youth, who had been pushed into his cell, had so submissively obeyed the soldier's call, although knowing he was going to certain death. Hunger had subjugated the human will. He implored the Lord to grant him the fortitude to die bravely, if he did not possess the strength for resistance.

Once more the sailors knocked at the door with the butt-ends

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of their rifles, kicked it with their heavy boots and pulled the bell, making it ring without stopping. Avdotia Markovna, Petroff's wife, opened the door, lighting the room with the small lamp she was carrying. On seeing the sailors her hands began trembling so violently that she almost dropped the lamp. She was pale and thin, and her eyes had an expression of hunger and fear.

"We have brought the master," the commissar said. "Comrades clear the apartment. Which was the General's favourite room?"

"The study Your Excellency," Avdotia Markovna said trembling all over.

"Take us there, comrade Madam."

"It is occupied by a communist sailor," murmured Avdotia Markovna.

"We will send him away. He is not such a very important bird," the commissar said.

Avdotia Markovna went down the passage into the drawing-room. An individual was sleeping on the sofa rolled up in a carpet. The air was heavy and stuffy.

Sablin noticed that all the locks on the doors were broken and that many of the bronze door-handles were missing. He walked through his own apartment failing to recognize it. The furniture had been moved. Even at first sight, in the semi-darkness, Sablin saw that many things were missing.

The study-door was thrown open. In the flickering light Sablin felt turned upon himself the gaze of Vera Constantinovna's blue eyes. The picture was hanging in its former place. Two bodies were lying on his couch in a close embrace. The sound of voices made them turn and rise. They were young. A silly-looking lad and a young girl with fat freckled cheeks and small narrow eyes. She sat down on the edge of the couch, swinging her big, bare feet and frowning at the light. Here too the air was stuffy and a fetid odour of human perspiration and dirt filled the room.

"Well, comrades, you have enjoyed the master's bed sufficiently," the commissar said.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"But where must we go, comrade? It is by the orders of the Tcheka that we are here, and we can't be turned out like this in the middle of the night. We are communists," protested the man speaking in a hoarse voice and scratching himself vehemently.

"I know what I am about," answered the commissar quietly. "There are many other rooms here. Take your belongings and clear out. I have received positive orders from the military Revolutionary Soviet.

"But how so," the lad retorted. "How can such orders be giving that communists who are working people should be turned out of their beds in the middle of the night. We are not bourgeois, comrade."

"Shut up," the sailor said, "if not, I shall have soon settled with both you and your friend."

"Comrade Commissar," the girl cried, "I insist on not being insulted."

The commissar merely looked at her without speaking, but evidently she saw something so threatening in his gaze, that she hastily began to pull black silk stockings on her not particularly clean feet.

"And you, comrade Madam," the commissar said, turning to Avdotia Markovna, "put the lamp on the table, bring pillows, sheets and a quilt, prepare the wash-stand and everything necessary for the General to pass the night as he was used to do when at home. And in the morning you will give him his breakfast."

"But how shall I do it, Your Excellency," Avdotia Markovna said, "if the communists who were here have taken all the linen. She too is pulling on our young lady's stockings. When she came yesterday she had none, but they hunted about and took all they could lay hands on—shirts, stockings and everything I had time to hide."

"Comrade," said the commissar to a tall sailor, "go with the comrade Madam and take everything that is necessary for the night. And tell them that from tomorrow the two neighboring rooms will be occupied by the guard."

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The pair who had been sleeping on Sablin's couch went away leaving behind one pillow, tumbled sheets and a warm quilt. Avdotia Markovna came back carrying a somewhat cleaner pillow, another quilt and began making a bed for Sablin on the couch. The commissar, after having placed a sentry at the door of the study, wished Sablin a good night's rest and left the room.

Avdotia Markovna was silently tidying the wash-stand, shaking out the quilt and spreading the sheets. Sablin stood leaning against the book-shelf.

"Well, how are you?" Sablin asked. "How did you get on without me?"

Avdotia Markovna stopped, quilt in hand, tears gathering in her eyes and murmured in a scarcely audible voice:

"Don't ask me, Your Excellency. The walls have ears here. They have shot my beloved Senitchka, my husband. Tomorrow is the fortieth* day. And why? Who can tell?"

And she went out of the room hastily and unsteadily.

Sablin remained alone. He took the night-lamp and came up to the table. Here he had locked up the fatal diary and forgotten it when he had fled. The cabinet where he had kept his papers was empty. Sablin came up to the bookcase. Half the books were missing. Several volumes were standing about in disorder with bindings torn off. The portraits of his ancestors were still hanging to the right and to the left of Vera Constantinovna's picture. The light was too weak to see them distinctly, but here and there shimmered the whites of the eyes, the pale foreheads, the gold of the uniforms and the lace of the dresses.

Sablin tottered with fatigue. All was dark before his eyes. He undressed hurriedly and threw himself on to the couch. The rapture of being still alive, of not having been executed thrilled him, giving him comfort and peace and he dropped into a sound, dreamless sleep.

It was day when Sablin woke up. He had gotten warm under his two quilts and lay, failing to understand for a long time

* By the tenets of the Orthodox Church memorial services are held for the deceased on the ninth, twentieth and fortieth days.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

where he was and how he had gotten here. At times he thought that maybe the events of the last few months, his escape from Petersburg, his arrest in the train, Smolny, the Petropavlovsk prison, Tania's letter with the fatal news of the cruel death of those he had loved so well—were but a painful, torturing nightmare. And now he had waked up, the wintry morning was looking in at his window and the ever beloved, dear Vera was smiling gently at him out of her frame.

Sleep had strengthened him, his head was clearer. Sablin noticed the absence of the carpets and of the fur rugs in his room. The parquet-floor was bare and soiled. Dust, husks of sun-flower seeds and dirt formed such a layer on some parts of the floor that it seemed to be covered with a coating of grey clay. . . . The locks, wrenched out of the table, had left big holes in the drawers and cabinets. The table was quite empty; the bronze-statuettes, the malachite writing-set had disappeared. The leather had been torn off the big, easy chair and it stood covered only with torn and shabby canvas. The atmosphere of the room was cold and heavy, cobwebs hung in all the corners.

No, everything had really happened: the revolution, the Bolsheviks, the soldiers' insults, Korjikoff, and the prison. What would happen now? He did not know. Why had they brought him home? Maybe there was another Government? Maybe the bloody fog had lifted from over Russia. Or were fresh tortures, fresh sufferings in store for him?

Sablin got up, washed and dressed. He approached the portrait. Somebody's sacrilegious hand had covered Vera Constantinovna's white, bridal dress with indecent, vile inscriptions in pencil and ink. Sablin sighed heavily and went to the window. A well-known view lay before him. A confectioner's sign used to hang on the opposite corner, but it was no longer there. The shop-windows were boarded up. Close by a long tail of waiting people were standing before a neighbouring door. Poorly clad individuals were trampling in the frost, but they were also laughing at something near by. A Red guard, carrying a rifle, was walking to and fro. An old gentleman, decently dressed, passed carrying a birch log. Two young girls, in good

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fur jackets, were pulling a little sleigh with planks, which had belonged to some fence, and a dirty bag filled with something. Their faces were emaciated, but they were laughing. A wide street stretched to the right leading to a square which was slightly visible. Three men were standing before a house reading a paper posted on a wall.

A sledge drawn by a black, well-fed, but badly groomed trotter passed. It was occupied by a young man in a grey soldier's overcoat, wearing a red band with golden stars on his sleeve. He was holding a richly dressed woman by the waist. But the horse, the coachman, the young man and the woman resembled so little a real trotter, a real officer and a real woman that they seemed a caricature. Gazing at his own street Sablin began to understand the decadents and the futurists. He understood their crooked houses, their horses formed of corners and the broken lines with which they drew people. Petersburg life had ceased to be a reality—it had become a picture and a bad and vulgar one. In these ten months it had changed into a caricature of real life and its aspect awed Sablin.

Avdotia Markovna looked in and seeing that he was up brought him his tea, bread and sugar.

"The Commissar has sent it," she said. "He has ordered that everything should be given you. I brought it here. The communists and their damsels are in the dining-room, it would be unpleasant for you there."

Sablin was about to address her, but she was gone before he could do so, evidently fearing to speak with him.

Sablin caught himself on the thought that he felt no indignation at his apartment having been plundered; the fact that strange people were living in his rooms and were using his things as if they belonged to them did not shock him, but he realized that he experienced a material enjoyment in drinking good tea, with black bread and sugar. The space and the light of the dirty, cold room affected him pleasantly. The sight of the soiled picture of the woman he had loved did not revolt him, nor the fact of his private papers having been stolen out of his family archives.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

"What is it?" he thought. "Is it the effect of prison and hunger? The subjugation of the will and of the spirit to the demands of the stomach and the body? And if I, who was strong, submitted to it and felt it, then what will become of those who are weak? They will lick the hand which beats them."

The commissar who had visited him in the Fortress had repeated to him some two weeks ago Trotsky's last bon mot: "We have obtained such complete submission of the bourgeoisie that if I ordered it to come tomorrow to the Tcheka on the Gorochovaya to be flogged, a long tail of bourgeois would form there."

It was the authority of hunger, the authority of the piece of bread. But he, Sablin, would not submit to it, however weak.

At six o'clock in the evening, the door of the study was opened and a tall, stout man came into the room. He was dressed in a soldier's military coat, lined with kangaroo fur, which he had kept on. The electric light had been turned on in the library as well as in the rest of the apartment and Sablin immediately recognized General Pestretzoff.

Sablin was sitting at his desk reading a book of Kouprin which he had found in his book-case.

He did not rise to meet his uninvited guest, but remained sitting, crossing his arms on his chest. Pestretzoff understood his gesture and said:

"Well, do as you like! We won't quarrel about it. When you have heard what I have to say, you will think differently of me. You have lived through a great deal, Sasha, and I too have suffered sufficiently. You know, Sasha, that I lived for two months selling the few belongings I possessed. Then I was deprived even of that and I spent six days in the streets selling the cakes Nina Nikolaevna baked. It was then that I was summoned to the Nicolas station. There, in a car of the Imperial train, I found my friends of the Academy—Bontch-Brouevitch and Baltisky. We spoke long and frankly. Remember—tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner. It is our misfortune that such as you don't understand them. Yes, you for instance, Sasha, were going to join Kaledin and Korniloff. What for?"

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It was in March, but listen my dear friend. . . . I don't know, Sasha . . . you always considered me a clever man. Yes, I know, I know, and I thought the same of you, but excuse me, I really can't understand one thing. You are silent, well don't speak and listen, listen."

"I am listening, Your Excellency, only because I can't throw you out of here. Strength is on your side," Sablin said in a weak voice.

"Oh, Sasha! Not so loud, not so loud, for God's sake," Pestretzoff said, waving his hand at him.

"Don't use God's name, you who have sold yourself to Satan!" Sablin said.

"Oh, dear! Always the same! . . . Well just wait one moment. You will speak differently when you have heard everything. The dreams of our ablest military academicians, who had always desired a universal military training of the people in the villages and schools, thereby achieving the transformation of the nation into an army numbering a hundred million have been realized by Trotsky. We are called, Sasha, to create the greatest army and with it to conquer the world. We need you! And how lucky it was that we found you in time and that you can work with us. I reported to Trotsky about you and he is pleased to entrust you with the organization of the Red cavalry."

Sablin got up. Oh, how weak he was! He cursed the months passed in confinement when he had fed on stale bread and water. His legs refused to carry him. He would have liked to choke the fat old man sitting on the coach in his warm coat. "Your Excellency," he exclaimed, "do you understand the vileness and dastardliness of your words and your actions? You help Lenin to form an army. . . . What for? For Russia? Oh, if they served Russia! If Russia were dear to them! They serve the Third International. They want a worldly revolution, the murder of the bourgeois and of the capitalists, the destruction of culture . . . the transformation of humanity into beasts and their surrender to them. And you, all of you, the better you organize the Red army, the more you employ your talents, your intellect, your will power, the more

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

harm will you bring to Russia. But listen. . . . You will never, never form a real army! You have robbed it of its Russian soul. . . . You have ruined the Russian soldier's faith, you have killed the Tsar, you are drowning your country in blood."

Sablin's voice failed him. He whispered the last words hoarsely. His strength forsook him. He sat down again in the big oak arm-chair, which he had bought at an exhibition of Russian hand-industry. He began speaking once more in a hoarse voice:

"Death. . . . I know that death awaits me. I know it, I am prepared for it. . . . Look around you. . . . It is you who have ruined everything. You have soiled it, spat upon it. You have covered beauty with vile inscriptions. You have pushed our wild and uncultured people to bloody deeds, to murder and to reckless plundering. You. . . . You. I will die soon, I know it, and I tell you—never, never will you demolish Russia! Mind you: Russia will rise and will deal you such a blow that nothing will be left of you. The fire of the people's wrath will consume you in this world, and you must know, Your Excellency, that if the Russian people are patient and humble, they are terribly cruel in their wrath and that they will stand up for their Russia! . . ."

A short silence reigned in the study. Pestretzoff did not answer Sablin's passionate speech, uttered in a weak, faltering voice. One could hear the communists scolding and quarreling behind the wall in the drawing-room. At last Pestretzoff rose and began speaking:

"Sasha," he said, and Sablin thought he could hear in his voice the warm tones of former years. "You spoke of death. . . . You can't know what Lenin is capable of, if he hears you still refuse to work with us. Don't forget: you are charged with attempting to join Korniloff who is struggling against the Republic of the Soviets. You did not deny it. This constitutes treason to the people and is punished with death. . . . In place of death I offer to have your apartment repaired, to give you back whatever will be possible of your former possessions, two full sets of equipment and. . . ."

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"Silence! Your Excellency, don't take advantage of your strength and my weakness. I shall never betray my country. And if I could not die for Russia in the ranks of the valorous Volunteer Army—I am ready to die here."

"You will be tortured," whispered Pestretzoff. Sablin's face lit up.

"So much the better!" he said. "The more terrible my tortures and those of the generals and officers you martyrize in the Tchekas—the greater is our sacrifice. I will accept torture as a happiness and with it . . . glory! . . ."

"Sasha," whispered Pestretzoff, so faintly that his words were scarcely heard and his old chin trembled. "I am ordered to tell you that your daughter Tatiana is arrested and held in Moscow at the disposal of the Tcheka. If you consent she will be immediately delivered and given back to you in complete inviolability."

A groan of agony escaped Sablin. He looked up at Vera Constantinovna's picture. Her blue eyes gazed down at him unflinchingly and firmly. An iron will was visible in his wife's delicate beauty. She had sacrificed her own life and she would give her daughter's, but she would not commit a vile action. . . .

"Never!" murmured Sablin. "Go away . . . you . . . hound!"

Sablin caught hold of his head. What he saw made him tremble from head to foot. Pestretzoff rose slowly from the couch he was sitting on, bent his stiff knees and kneeling bowed before Sablin touching the floor with his forehead. Then rising heavily he went silently towards the door with shuffling, tottering steps.

Sablin was so bewildered that he remained sitting speechless in his arm-chair. Several minutes after Pestretzoff had gone the light was extinguished in the entire apartment.

The foreboding of something terrible—of death, and sufferings—weighed upon Sablin.

A petroleum lamp was brought into the study and Avdotia Markovna came in with his dinner.

"The Commissar has sent it," she said.

FROM DOUBLE EAGLE

The dinner had been warmed up, but even in former times it would have been considered good. It consisted of consommé with a piece of meat, fish with potatoes, a wing of roasted chicken and two sweet cakes. Evidently the commissar still considered the affair as concluded and did not admit of a refusal.

The lamp was taken away after dinner and Sablin remained in the dark library. He knew that this night he would be taken away and he was preparing himself in consequence. He lay down without undressing, so as to be spared the humiliation of putting on his clothes before the mocking guards. He went to sleep and immediately saw a terrible dream. He was looking at a sea of troubled water. It was slightly agitated and many of his friends and acquaintances were swimming in it and drowning. Sablin was also swimming, but his strength was forsaking him and he was sinking. When he was touching the bottom he saw that it was covered with guns, banners with the Double-headed Eagle and with bones. And suddenly among the skeletons he saw two corpses. They were fixed by the legs to iron balls and the water had lifted them. In one of them he recognized his dead son Kolia. He was dressed in the uniform of the Pages' Corps. The other was Tania's body in a white ball-dress. The water was gently swaying their bodies, lifting and lowering the black eyelashes on their greenish faces. The water was carrying the drowning Sablin towards them.

He woke up. The room was cold and damp. Sablin could not get warm even under his two quilts.

VIII

SUDDENLY the electricity flashed up in all the apartment. In the stillness of the night the communists had waked up and were whispering anxiously, packing their belongings. Avdotia Markovna with dishevelled hair, in an old, shabby dressing gown, thrust her head through the door saying in a frightened voice:

"A search will take place directly, Your Excellency."

TO RED FLAG

But Sablin understood that it was not a search, but that his last hour had struck.

Cars were throbbing in the street. Sablin went to the window. Red guards were getting out of a big lorry. A small Ford, lit up by the light of the car's lanterns, was standing behind it and was occupied by two men.

A few minutes later eight Red Guards entered Sablin's study. Four of them were young—about eighteen years of age, with stupid, insolent, clean-shaven faces. The fifth was a red-haired fellow with a freckled face. Sablin thought he had seen him before. His narrow eyes, like those of a pig, stared stupidly from under inflamed lids. The sixth was a healthy-looking peasant with a beardless face. His small, closely cut moustache did not harmonise with his fat cheeks and fleshy nose. He wore an expression of bestial joyfulness. The other two men were Chinese.

The whole lot of them rushed at Sablin, as if fearing that he might run away or attempt to resist them. They grabbed him and forced him into the oak arm-chair, where they tied him firmly by the legs, the arms and the waist. Someone, who was standing at the door gave the orders.

"Place him beside the bed!" he said. "Turn him towards the window! That's so!"

Sablin was seated opposite Vera Constantinovna's portrait.

"Now, all of you, go away. Vam-poo, prepare everything as you did in Charkoff. Do you understand? You are to wait in the next room," the voice said in the door-way.

The study was empty. Sablin was alone. Vera was gazing at him and against his will sweet memories rose in Sablin's mind.

A young man with brilliant grey eyes entered the room, walking with assurance. He was dressed in a leather suit. Two big revolvers hung at both sides of the yellow belt which kept his jacket in at the waist.

Sablin recognized Korjikoff.

And it was not only Korjikoff he recognized in the young man; he saw also himself. Yes, that is how he looked the first

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years after his promotion when he had been at Gritzenko's party. It was his height and his small, thoroughbred hands, and the dignified bearing of the Sablins and their proud gait. So had he come up to Gritzenko shielding Zahar. . . .

Korjikoff's eyes glistened. He came up to the writing-table and leaned against it.

"My dear Papa!" he said smiling. "And now you see you are mine. But how they stood up for you in the Military Revolutionary Soviet. Trotsky himself was for you."

One could hear the chauffeurs moving in the street, interchanging brief sentences.

"Do you know me?" Korjikoff asked abruptly.

Sablin was silent.

Korjikoff took a pocket-book out of his pocket and produced two pictures. He brought them close to Sablin's face. One was Marousia's portrait, the other was Sablin in his youth.

"This is my father and my mother," said Korjikoff winking slyly. "And it is you who are my Papa. Do you feel any fatherly tenderness for me? Eh? Are you proud of me? You—when you were my age, were only a lieutenant of a regiment of the Guard; I am a commissar and a member of the Extraordinary Commission. That's a career, my dear Papa! I start life differently than you did. Now I look at you and I find you resemble me. I belong to you and nevertheless I have no feeling of any kind for you. Whether it is you or this table is the same to me."

Korjikoff lit a cigarette.

"Would you care to smoke?" he said coming up and thrusting his cigarette between Sablin's lips. Although Sablin wanted to smoke very badly, he spat the cigarette out.

"As you like," said Korjikoff. "Let us talk seriously. Does a human being possess a soul? You think he does and I think he does not. You consider that man has been created by God and I don't think it. Man is like a rabbit or a louse, he is born of mucus and there is nothing in him. You probably loved my mother and she adored you and I was born of your love—and nevertheless I don't even know you, so where is the soul? I

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have a friend, the comrade Dora. She worked in the Odessa Tcheka. These questions interested her. 'If a human being has a soul,' said she, 'then where does it go after he is killed?' And this is what she did: she would sit down on a chair with legs wide apart and naked counter-revolutionaries were placed behind her. They were made to crawl under her chair on all fours and when a head appeared between her legs she would shoot, hitting the prisoner in the temple. Then she would watch for something to happen. Of course nothing ever did; there was only a bad smell. She used to settle thirty people a day and never once saw a soul. So evidently there is no God. . . ."

"You are silent," Korjikoff continued, smoking his cigarette. "You don't answer. Probably it is all highly unpleasant for you—I—your son, my mother's memory and all such rubbish. Yes . . . well, if you like we can alter everything. You can write a paper tonight in which you recognize me for your legitimate son. Yes, and I shall be called Victor Alexandrovitch Sablin. But why should it be Victor? I have not been christened. Surely you have names belonging to your family? I ought to be named after my grandfather—Nicholas Alexandrovitch. And you yourself shall consent to join the military revolutionary Soviet and the communist party. Brussiloff has placed his son in Boudeniy's cavalry and you shall take me into your Red cavalry. We will decorate you with the five-pointed star, Papa, you will have a Commander's band on your sleeve and see how fine you will be—General Sablin swearing fidelity to the Red flag of the Third International! That is a career Papa!"

Korjikoff glanced round at the portraits of his father's ancestors hanging on both sides of Vera Constantinovna's picture and spoke with the same pretty expression which had once been Marousia's.

"Your ancestors! How glad they will be! And you, Papa, need not be anxious. These ancestors don't exist. It's all rubbish. The traditions of a race! It's all rot. And what about this one—your last fancy? Rasputin's admirer? I read her diary, Papa, when your papers were brought to the Tcheka after

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the search here. They interested me. Maybe it was the voice of the blood speaking in me; maybe it was the interest I had for my stepmother's case? a most curious story. And what were you thinking about? You a hero, a knight! Really, Papa, you are a funny body! In the old days you didn't dare thrash my uncle Lubovin for his insolence, then you gave me up to Victor Victorovitch; you did not even make Rasputin pay for his action. How so? She must have been beautiful. I love her style. In general I have your tastes, but I am bolder than you were. I have experienced and tasted everything. Well, of course, the present communistic régime allows greater possibilities.

"Well, Papa, what have you to say to my plan? Sablin father and son, both serving in the Red Army! How many soldiers and Cossacks will come to join you from Denikin's army! They will say that if Sablin has acknowledged the Workmen's and Peasants' authority then surely it must be the right, lawful power. Well, have you made up your mind? You have only to nod your head and everything will come of itself—women, wealth and dignities. Eh, Papa? I assure you, it's my son's love which is speaking in me. Something like the voice of the blood!"

Korjikoff stood, waiting for an answer. But Sablin was silent. His gaze fixed on Korjikoff expressed such suffering and hatred that Victor easily read his answer.

"Well," he said, getting up and going into the corner of the room. "Frankly I did not expect a different answer. Still—you and I are both Sablins. You serve under the Double-headed Eagle, I under the Red flag of the Third International. We both understand our duty thoroughly, but excuse me, I will have my last say. In case you reject our offer, besides yourself your daughter will also perish. I have decided to destroy her. I will deliver her to the Red Guards. You understand me—don't you? I will keep my word. Do you consent to join our party?"

"Never!" Sablin exclaimed.

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"Very well," Korjikoff said coldly. "I will take my measures."

"You loved her," Korjikoff said. He placed himself behind Sablin and spoke into his ear. "Her memory is dear to you. You gaze at her picture and you think she is blessing you, your sufferings and your death. We will disfigure her."

Korjikoff took out his revolver.

"I am a crack shot. A black hole will replace her right, blue eye. And you, Papa, just try and imagine she is alive."

A shot sounded dully behind Sablin. And at the same moment the picture swung to one side and fell down with a crash. The old frame struck the floor and broke, while the picture itself rolled behind the cabinet which stood under it. It was so unexpected and uncanny that Korjikoff pressed his hands to his chest and big drops of perspiration stood out on Sablin's forehead.

"Well, what is there so wonderful!" Korjikoff exclaimed. "The bullet broke the cord and naturally the picture fell down. The frame was very old. It was cleverly done. And now we will shoot at Mamma!"

Korjikoff placed Marousia's picture on the cabinet.

"Your hand would surely have trembled," he said. "You would not have even dared fire at the picture of my mother. How could you? And for me it is the same as if . . ." and Korjikoff used a peasant's low curse.

"I will hit Mamma straight in the forehead," he said.

He fired, but the bullet hit half an inch higher than the picture!

"It is odd," Korjikoff said. "It has never happened that I should miss at seven paces. I can hit a ten copeck-piece and here. . . ! Well let us try again!"

But he missed once more. Sablin sat lost in thought. How they had changed and upset everything in Russia! Formerly had a shot been fired in a Petersburg apartment in this same Gogol street, it would have inevitably been followed by the appearance of the porter. The police would come and inquire: "Who had fired and why had it been done?" Sablin remem-

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bered how after Lubovin had shot at him the whole regiment was in a turmoil. "Someone fired a shot in Lieutenant Sablin's lodging! . . ." It was an event. And now one shot followed another, the neighbouring rooms were full of communists and Red Guards and no one was interested in what was happening.

The repeated shots fired at Sablin's ear irritated him, but diverted him as well. He desired passionately that Korjikoff should not hit Marousia's picture. A son may not shoot even at the likeness of his mother. Was it mysticism? Let it be mysticism! But if he misses, then I am right and not he. It means he is not a rabbit born of mucus, but has an everlasting soul. A vicious, vile, but an everlasting one and in this case invisible threads stretch from him to the dead Marousia and reach Sablin. The seventh bullet struck quite close, but the picture did not stir.

"You wretch!" Korjikoff said. "But wait a moment. Don't you triumph, Papa. You just wait! Your turn will come! Hullo!" he shouted as Sablin had done in days gone by, "Hullo! Here, comrades!" The Red Guards rushed into the room.

"Vam-poo? Is it ready?" Korjikoff asked.

"Yes, everything is ready, comrade commissar," answered the Chinaman, his yellow face quite passionless.

"You will pull it off as you did in Charkoff?" Korjikoff asked.

The Chinese nodded his head. His narrow eyes were lifeless, his flat, greasy face looked like a mask.

"Drag the General into the kitchen. Comrades untie him," Korjikoff ordered.

The Red Guards rushed at Sablin. They were dirty and shabby. Their bodies smelt of perspiration and Sablin, weakened by everything that had taken place, almost fainted. Everything grew dark before his eyes. He saw the people but indistinctly. They dragged him across the rooms, into the kitchen, where the stove was burning brightly. A kettle full of boiling and bubbling water was standing upon it. Sablin was led up to the very edge of the stove. All around he saw eager, curious faces. The Red Guards looked alternately at Sablin and at

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Korjikoff waiting for something new, which would stir their strong nerves. Three electric lamps lit the kitchen up brightly. The scared Avdotia Markovna was sitting on her bed, her head buried in her pillows.

"Am I like the General, comrades?" Korjikoff said.

"Yes, you are like him, his living image," answered the men.

"Well, comrades, he is my father. He dishonoured a workman's daughter in days gone by and then abandoned her. I was her son; he forsook me too. It all happened at the time when Russia was ruled by a Tsar and all was possible for the nobles. What does he deserve?"

"Death!" roared the voices.

Korjikoff smiled and taking Sablin's wrist lifted his hand.

"Comrades, do you see what hands this bourgeois has?" he inquired.

"Like a girl's," said a red-haired soldier, who was holding Sablin firmly round the body.

"With these very hands, His Excellency struck the soldiers' faces in honour of the Tsar and the capitalists," Korjikoff exclaimed in a shrill voice.

The communist lodgers and two women were pressing in the door-way, gradually pushing their way into the kitchen.

"Comrades," Korjikoff continued. "This General, not wishing to recognize the workmen's and peasants' authority disguised himself and made his way to Kaledin and Korniloff. I overtook him and brought him to be judged by the people, who condemned him to death."

"That's right!" the communists and the Red Guards shouted.

The kitchen was suddenly very quiet, and Sablin heard one of the women whisper: "Is he going to be finished off at once here? That's interesting!"

Sablin did not see pity in any of the faces which surrounded him. Avdotia Markovna was experiencing nothing but acute terror and she trembled with fever. One of the women, wrapped up in Tania's Orenburg shawl drew up nearer. Sablin recognized her. It was Pasha, Tania's personal maid. She

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had grown fat and her red cheeks were puffed. She was barefooted and Tania's lace petticoat hung above her knees.

"These gentlemen," Korjikoff said, speaking in the silenced room, "were in the habit of wearing white gloves. They despised us, the common people. For them we were but low animals."

Everything grew dark in Sablin's eyes. He no longer saw the crowd of onlookers, nor the kitchen. Close to him the water was bubbling in the kettle and the wood was crackling. Pasha's face stood out distinctly with black shadows under the eyes, a satisfied fat face, full of womanly eager curiosity. He saw the shawl on her shoulders, which he had so often seen wrapped round Tania.

"We will pull the General's white gloves off," he heard a voice say quite close to him. But the voice had a muffled sound and the faces were as if in a haze. The room was as hot as a Russian bath after a great quantity of steam has been let in, when the voices have a muffled sound and the words can scarcely be heard.

"Undress the General," Korjikoff ordered.

The Red Guards pulled off Sablin's coat, his trousers, his shoes and his socks. Sablin vaguely understood that the end was approaching, but his consciousness was numbed and his body had lost all sensibility. He was standing on the floor with bare feet, but he did not feel it.

The crowd of lodgers drew nearer.

"It means they will finish him off here," Pasha remarked. Her brown eyes were full of eagerness and curiosity.

"Vam-poo," Korjikoff said. "Go ahead!"

The Chinese pushed his way through the crowd and came up to Sablin. He took his arm from the Red Guard who had been holding him and gripped it firmly at the elbow with his sinewy-brown fingers. Then he did the same thing with Sablin's other hand. The blood stopped flowing to the finger-tips and the hands were benumbed.

Then by a quick and brisk motion the Chinaman put both Sablin's hands into the boiling water.

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The crowd breathed a heavy sigh. Sablin's face turned deathly pale. His eyes opened wide and big tears rolled down his cheeks. He slightly opened his mouth, but he uttered no groan. All eyes were fixed upon his face. The Chinaman alone looked into the kettle with a business-like air.

"Bourgoui! He did not even scream!" muttered the red-haired soldier with hatred. The younger men looked straight into Sablin's face and breathed heavily.

"Doesn't he feel anything?" said someone in the crowd.

"Oh, God," murmured Pasha.

It was intensely quiet. One could hear the people's heavy breathing. The water was bubbling in the kettle and Sablin's hands were getting whiter and whiter, gradually losing all life. The electric light burnt brilliantly as if for a festivity of some kind.

Korjikoff was looking admiringly at Sablin.

"These damned bourgeois know how to die," thought he.

"Hold them so!" the Chinese said to the red-haired soldier giving him Sablin's hands. He produced a knife. Drops of perspiration from the heat and the steam stood out on his greasy yellow face. Slowly, pressing hard on the knife, he cut the skin on Sablin's hand all around. Blood trickled from under the soldier's fingers and fell in big drops into the boiling water.

It was still quieter. Sablin no longer saw the crowd of soldiers encircling him. He continued standing firmly, but a throbbing noise filled his ears. Absurd ideas passed through his mind. His chin was trembling. He strained his will not to moan.

Having cut the skin, the Chinese turned it off most carefully and then took the hands gradually out of the boiling water so as to pull the skin off.

The crowd pressed still closer and keeping their breath the people watched the proceedings as a most curious experiment.

"Oh, God! They have pulled the skin off a living being," murmured Pasha.

She was so near to Sablin that he could feel the smell of the

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perfumed ointment she used for her hair. The odour was most obnoxious to Sablin, but he did not see her face, nor his own hands.

"The fingers, the fingers!" Pasha whispered. "Oh, dear! How thin they are, you can see the bones. The nails have come off with the skin."

Sablin felt vaguely a sensation of cold in his hands and a sharp pain. They had been taken out of the boiling water.

Then he was hit in the face with something warm and wet, something that felt like leather and he heard Korjikoff's insolent laugh.

"I will put these gloves on, Papa, when I embrace my sister."

After that Sablin lost consciousness.

Sablin came back to his senses in the frosty air. He was being led barefooted over the snow. Two men were holding him under the arms, the third was pushing him on from behind. They were going along a street; Sablin saw the dark sky and a few stars overhead. The big stone houses were dark and gloomy, the snow struck him as being very white under his feet. His hands were sticking up straight before his face, but he did not recognize them. The black fingers were thrust asunder and they throbbed with a burning pain.

But Sablin was not astonished at being led in the night through the streets barefooted over the snow. He was following his own Gogol street. The strangest and oddest thought rose in his mind.

"One can easily catch cold in the winter without a coat," he thought. "The skin will probably never heal. My hands will have to be amputated. But what for, when I am going to be executed. And the risk of catching cold and my hands are nothing in comparison to death." And still he could not understand the meaning of death, that soon everything would be over. Vera had been carried away from this same street. It was a sunny day and the air was fragrant with the smell of the fir-branches with which the street had been strewn. He was following the coffin and just before him was a big wreath of madonna lilies and of roses. It had been sent by the Empress.

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White and black ribbons were tied to it. The wind pulled them about. Kolia was walking beside him in a black uniform and a shako with white plumage. On his other side walked Tania dressed in deep mourning. They were both weeping.

Sablin did not cry. . . .

From here he had driven with Vera to listen to the Tsigans in a sledge drawn by a pair of trotters, covered with a big net. The frost bit his nose and ears.

The frost and the snow were different then.

Out of a hundred faces of relations and friends stood out for a moment Pestretzoff's face, but he too had become a stranger. Oh, Lord! Life was at an end. And no one knows anything! Pasha looked at him with curious eyes and hated him. The same Pasha, who, when he had come the first time from the front, had looked at him with the eyes of a woman ready to surrender herself. His tortures and his death were useless. None would know about them, none would see him. He probably had fever, he could not clearly understand what was happening with him and at times he no longer felt the acute pain in his hands.

They entered a gateway. Two motor-lorries were standing in the yard and the noise throbbed painfully in his head and his ears. His legs trembled and he could hardly stand. They descended into a cellar along dirty and slippery stairs. Small electric lamps hanging down on wires from the ceiling were burning dimly. A hideous odour of decaying blood filled the air and bodies of dead people in dirty underwear were lying about. Shots sounded dully.

A man dressed in leather came up to Sablin.

"Place him," he said.

Sablin was put to the wall. He was so weak that he leaned against it. It gave him an unpleasant sensation of cold through his underwear. He ceased to understand. A man dressed in black with a cap set on the back of his head approached him. A red star was fixed on to his creased cap. His motions were slow and listless. He seemed tired and breathed with difficulty,

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as if after heavy work. His young beardless face was pale and his eyes glistened feverishly.

"Oh!" he said. "How they have mutilated him. . . . White Guard! . . ."

Sablin distinctly heard the words and they pleased him.

"Will you shoot him yourself, comrade?" asked the man in black. "I have enough of it and I'm deadly tired. No emotions today. Officers alone. No one implored for mercy, no one crawled on their knees, no one was terror-stricken. . . . It was most stale. . . ."

Sablin heard this with satisfaction. No one had implored, no one had crawled before them. Officers!

"And I too am an officer," he thought, lifting his head and pulling himself up.

Marousia's face appeared before him. But Sablin understood that it was not her's but Korjikoff's and he forced his eyes to express indifference and calmness.

"The Sablin's know how to die!" Korjikoff said, and Sablin felt on his temple the cold of the muzzle.

The lorries were throbbing outside, making a rumbling noise. All the bright life was concentrated in this small garage full of the smell of decaying blood, where the backs of the victims felt the damp cold of the brick walls and the bare feet slipped in bloody slime. Dead bodies were lying all around. Red Guards armed with rifles were crowding near the walls and two men clad in leather suits sauntered about in the midst of this chaos, giving themselves the airs of masters.

"And this is Russia," thought Sablin.

At dawn on a winter day Red Guards were loading dead bodies into lorries in the yard of the Extraordinary Commission.

They were bringing out naked corpses carrying them by the feet and by the heads and placing them in the lorries. Blood trickled up on the dirty snow.

"But this is General Sablin!" a tall handsome soldier remarked, lifting a dead body in underwear on the lorry.

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"Did you know him?" asked the man who had brought the body.

"Certainly. He was a kind gentleman. It was with him we charged the German battery. A fine and brave officer."

"Look comrade, how they have mutilated him. The skin has been torn off his hands."

"Yes, they have been at him. It is a great pity. He was a fine gentleman."

"There are no more gentlemen!" the first soldier said severely. "What are you whimpering about. Don't you know where you are? Mind, you will yet be put to the wall yourself, if you are not careful."

The soldier sighed and was silent.

IX

THE political committee of Korjikoff's regiment is giving an evening party. The assembled guests are the officer in command of the regiment, several communists, two agents of the Tcheka, the members of the Extraordinary Commission for the struggle against counter-revolution, the Lett Gaiduk, Schlossberg and his usual companion—Jenny, also a member of the Tcheka, and two former society girls, Mimi Granilin and Baby Drantsoff, the mistresses of commissars.

Twenty people were assembled in Korjikoff's new apartment, which he had just furnished in the regimental barracks.

Notwithstanding the hot July evening all the windows of the apartment were closed. A nauseous smell of uncleanness comes from the Neva and the boulevards, which are quite empty and on which grass is growing between the stone-flags. Two shabby cars are standing waiting before the door; one is a town car for the girls, the other a touring car for the agents of the Tcheka, in case of their being summoned.

It is a warm, calm night. The Neva glistening in the silvery rays of the moon-light silently rolls her dark, cold waves. No fires of ships are to be seen and a low long torpedo-boat stands like a dark vision near the Nikolaevsky Bridge. The houses are dark and seem to be plunged in an everlasting sleep. A

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sentry is pacing to and fro near the bridge to question passers-by, but there are none.

Korjikoff's apartment was furnished very peculiarly: pictures of old Russian "Boyars" and noble "Boyarini" * in dresses of ceremony, of Generals with stars and decorations, of statesmen in powdered wigs, are hanging in the big drawing-room. A long table decked for supper is standing under the bronze electric chandelier in which the lights are not burning. Heavy oak chairs and easy chairs, small chairs upholstered in faded blue silk are placed around it. Here also is a sofa and an oriental couch—an amalgam of dining-room, study and drawing-room furniture. Everything is costly, dirty and dusty. Korjikoff's study is in the next room. An immense writing table, damaged and with broken locks stands in the room with separate pieces of a costly malachite writing set scattered upon it. But it also is incomplete. One of the ink-stands is missing, a paw of the bronze bear is broken off. A few papers, several numbers of "The News" and a list of some kind are lying on the table. A large easy chair, a big sofa and two book-cases with smashed glasses in their doors and without books also stand in the room.

The supper-table is covered with a disorder of hors-d'oeuvres, various wines and dishes with roasted fowl and joints. The guests were in keeping with the surroundings. They too looked as if they had been collected and requisitioned from all over Russia and then mixed up all together. They were scattered about the room and ate in a disorderly way.

The master of the house is sitting at the head of the table in a deep blue easy chair. He is wearing the habitual, new, shining black leather jacket, decorated with red and golden emblems. It is unfastened and shows a red silk shirt, tucked into leather breeches; two revolvers are stuck in the belt. Korjikoff never parts with them. His young face, worn out with vice, cocaine and drink, is gloomy. He is visibly out of temper. He is in one of those heavy moods when everything is possible and when

* Russian nobility of old times.

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he dares everything. The commanding officer of the communistic regiment, Pavel Goloub is sitting in an easy chair on his right hand. He is a powerfully built man of about forty-five, a former sergeant. He is bald, stout, muscular and strong. His florid face is covered with wrinkles from which peep out a pair of grey eyes always expressing servility. On Korjikoff's other hand sits the military specialist—Rachmatoff, an elderly cavalry Colonel, who has sold himself to the Third International. He is elegantly dressed in a black hussar tunic, with magenta breeches, the uniform of the former cavalry school.

He is sipping his champagne in the careless manner of a man used to it, and keeps his big, bright eyes fixed on the young communist who is sitting opposite him, and who is also a military specialist. It is the comrade Nikolai Polejaeff. He is elegantly attired in a new, well-fitting English military tunic, with red bands on the chest and red and golden stars embroidered on his sleeve. He is a hero of the Polish war—a rising star of the Red Army. Next to him Osetroff is busily engaged with the wing of a turkey. He has grown much thinner, but carries himself well and looks at Polejaeff with enamoured eyes. He is his idol of the moment and he is ready to follow him through fire and water.

The other guests—young men in Russian shirts with red bands across the chest, with red belts, in old uniforms, in lounge suits, are sitting some beside the table, others on the sofa. They have taken much wine and find it difficult to control their spirits, but they fear the master of the house and from time to time look at him anxiously.

Two Red guards in wide, badly fitting Russian shirts are carrying the tea round, carefully walking on tip-toe.

Mimi Granilin is sitting on a small chair near the window, beside a big vase of flowers, waving her fan, looking down at a handsome officer—the communist Osetroff. She is dressed in a costly embroidered silk frock, close-fitting and narrow, which shows her delicate legs.

Baby Drantsoff is lying on the couch. She is in the full bloom of her twenty-four years. Her head, with its classic profile,

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with immense grey-blue eyes, high, white forehead, sallow complexion delicately pink and her dark hair, which she wears bobbed after the sovdep fashion is full of dignified grace. Her broad shoulders and generously exhibited, well developed bust are snow-white. Her close-fitting dress outlines her tall figure with broad hips and slender legs. Two years ago she had been outraged by a handsome sailor at an examination at the Tcheka and since then she has been morally unstrung. She had cast off all her education. To eat and drink, to enjoy herself, to loll in bed with strong men smelling of gun-powder and blood, who dare everything, to accept their presents: rings stained with blood, bracelets and brooches, coming from unknown sources, to hunt in other people's cup-boards and wardrobes and then shamelessly try on before the men underwear and dresses which did not belong to her—all this had become her life. Her body full of vitality longed for strong sensations and she became famous among the mistresses of commissars.

Schlossberg is lying on the couch beside her, embracing her. He is completely drunk and Baby hates the touch of his damp, cold hands. But she dares not send him away.

"Comrade," she whispers. "Do you know the comrade Polejaeff?"

"No and why?"

"I have been told that he is a peculiar communist, that he has never had to do with women."

"Well, and I suppose, Baby, that he is just the man for you."

"And why not. I suppose he must be interesting."

"I'll manage it."

"And what about comrade Korjikoff?"

"Oh, it's indifferent to him!"

"You doubt comrade that these are my ancestors?" Korjikoff was saying to Polejaeff looking straight at him with half closed eyes.

For two weeks Korjikoff had been feeling uncomfortable in the young officer's presence. A scythe had come across a stone, as a Russian proverb says. This young man, a perfect communist from every point of view, had come from the Polish

front with the highest and most brilliant testimonials given him by Touchatchevsky and Boudenniy. A special favourite of Trotsky's, he affects Korjikoff strangely. In this young man's presence he feels his will-power paralysed, this enrages him and he meets a cold mocking smile. The comrade Polejaeff tells him straight out things for which he ought to be shot on the spot, but Korjikoff is silent, smiling awkwardly. At the present moment everybody is drunk except Korjikoff and Polejaeff. Korjikoff wants to vex Polejaeff, to humiliate and crush him.

"If they were your ancestors you would surely know who they were," Polejaeff answered coldly and his icy calmness irritated Korjikoff. "You have brought them over here from General Sablin's flat and after having hung them without any taste or understanding have imagined that you have become their descendant."

"Sablin was my father," Korjikoff said quickly.

"I don't doubt it. That is why you bear the name of an executed Social-Revolutionary," Polejaeff said coldly.

"It is because I was born out of wedlock."

"But do you know what is marriage?" Polejaeff asked mockingly.

"The communists don't acknowledge marriage," Korjikoff said.

"Then why do you speak about it?"

Korjikoff rose and left Polejaeff. He was enraged.

"Waiters!" he shouted loudly.

A Red Guard ran up to him, standing at attention.

"Comrade, run to the squadron and order my singers and musicians. Quick!"

The Red Guard rushed to fulfill the political commissar's order.

"I have an orchestra for you, Mr. Commissar," the Commander of the regiment said, winking his eyes under their swollen red lids. "Like comrade Boudenniy's. Two accordions and a clarinet. But they play most wonderfully. You will hear them directly. And they know all the new songs, about Koltchak and the volunteers. They know the best there are."

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"Well, we'll hear them," Korjikoff dropped the words negligently.

The musicians numbered five men. They had been fetched out of their beds and had come grubby, dishevelled and smelling badly. They were dressed in shabby tunics and breeches and their pale faces were stamped with sickness and lack of nourishment.

"You hounds!" Goloub shouted at them fiercely. "You couldn't tidy your hair—you scoundrels! You good for nothings. Be quick and tidy yourselves. Take care that I don't see you in this state again."

They went to the kitchen but did not look much better when they came back.

The accordion struck a shrill note, the clarinet joined in, then the other accordion, and a common, coarse melody filled the hall. The talking stopped.

A high, hoarse tenor voice rang out like a lament, to the accompaniment of the droning sounds of the accordions and the clarinet. It was hardly singing, but suggested rather the cries of the Jaroslav peasants who used to offer their wares in former days in the yards of town houses and villas. Then they sang one of the numerous vulgar songs brought on by the revolution.

"What's that," Polejaeff said when the musicians had finished the second song. "When I was out walking through the town today, I heard another melody. Give me the accordion, comrade."

Polejaeff looked around coolly and began singing a popular tune, mocking the communists and the commissars.

"That's a good one!" exclaimed Goloub. "That's well said: 'My husband is a commissar—I'm a speculator. . . .' That hits it."

"It's a White Guards' song!" said Korjikoff, scornfully. "Where did you get hold of it, comrade?"

"I heard it in the Petrocommune. Boys were singing it in the street on the 25th of October."

"Apparently the Tcheka has not visited it till now," remarked Gaiduk.

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"Wait a bit, it will get there," Korjikoff said grimly.

Everybody had grown silent. The agents Gaiduk and Schlossberg had approached Korjikoff, ready to catch hold of Polejaeff. Jenny was looking intently at Nika, a pale smile on her face. Baby Drantsoff had lifted herself up and was resting on her elbow gazing at him with admiration. A certain movement was also perceptible among the officers. "Oh!" exclaimed Goloub bitterly, his grey eyes filling with tears. Polejaeff alone remained perfectly calm. He went to the piano with quiet firm steps, opened it and tried it without sitting down.

"You there! Orchestra of Boudenniy!" he shouted imperatively. "Hush! Not a sound! Don't poison my Russian ear with rubbish invented by hooligans and counter-revolutionaries! I will sing."

He struck a powerful chord and his strong voice rung through the room:

"Pour me some wine.
My glass is empty,
When there's no wine, there is no song!
In wine is love,
And depth of passion.
The world is small for our revelry!"

"Eh, comrade," called Nika, interrupting his song, "give me a glass of wine!"

Korjikoff approached him with the stealthy steps of a cat.

"What are you thinking about," he hissed. "You seem to forget that I am the master here!"

"The master," Nika roared without turning round. "You are mad, comrade commissar; glory be to Lenin, we live in a communistic state and there is no property here. Comrade—give me some wine!"

The Red Guard came up with a bottle and a glass. Polejaeff deliberately emptied his glass without taking his eyes off Korjikoff and then turning once more to the piano began playing. Melodies of old Russian songs and Russian operas flowed from under his fingers, stirring vague memories. Polejaeff began

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by a gay popular song; he played with gusto, smiling and winking, then he broke off abruptly and a melancholy slow melody sounded through the hall. Then he passed on to the opera "A Life for the Tsar," carefully, as if teasing, struck two chords of the Russian Anthem and immediately played the gay song "Vanka."

"Well, come along, comrades! You surely know it, why are you silent? Eh?"

And he began singing it himself.

Rachmatoff was the first to join him, then the younger people could resist no longer, even Goloub sang in his quivering old voice, tears rolling down his cheeks.

Everyone of the guests were singing. Korjikoff alone kept silent walking up and down the big room.

Polejaeff began playing the popular Russian song "Down the Mother Volga" and the chorus of guests took up the powerful Russian song without waiting to be asked.

"Boudenniy, sing correctly!" Polejaeff shouted from the piano.

The melody rose and spread. Korjikoff paced to and fro under his ancestors' pictures and he thought their eyes followed him. He smelt some cocaine, but it made him feel still worse.

He saw that not only his guests alone were singing but that all his ancestors in their pictures had opened their mouths and were singing the cursed Russian melody. He looked round. All the guests and all the waiters were also singing. The young Red guard, who had brought Polejaeff the wine, had put the bottle down and with wide-opened grey eyes was smiling happily and singing lustily in a strong voice.

"Oh, you scoundrel!" Korjikoff hissed and snatching his heavy revolver from his belt fired straight into the guard's open mouth.

The man choked and dropped down, hitting the back of his head heavily against the corner of the couch. The dark, thick blood oozed out of the black hole which had once been his mouth.

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There was a commotion in the room. Gaiduk and Schlossberg ran up to Korjikoff.

"It's counter-revolution?" murmured Gaiduk.

"Yes," said Korjikoff proudly.

He was beside himself. He sniffed through distended nostrils the smell of blood and cold gun powder, looking at Baby Drantsoff with the savage eyes of a beast. She was sobbing, convulsed in hysterics on the couch. The guests had not stirred from their seats. The musicians were standing in one corner, ready to run away. Rachmatoff stood beside them, with a dull smile fixed on his face. Polejaeff alone continued sitting at the piano, looking by turns at Korjikoff and at the dead body. It was lying quite close to the couch with its head but a little lower than Baby's where she sobbed among the cushions.

Korjikoff in two strides was beside Baby. He bent over her and began taking her dress off with quick, adroit movements. She had calmed down and looked at him submissively. A minute later a beautiful nude woman lay beside the dead body.

Intense silence reigned in the room. The mind refused to grasp what was taking place: the dead body with its black sunken mouth, the big eyes which protruded out of their sockets, the white forehead with the dishevelled hair falling upon it, a black pool of blood shimmering in the electric light—while two bodies were writhing clasped in a voluptuous embrace above the dead. Baby's sighs were mixed with Korjikoff's heavy breathing. Mimi Granilin sat in an arm-chair with closed eyes. She had fainted; the Red guards watched Korjikoff with the dense avidity of beasts and licked their parched lips.

Polejaeff turned to the piano and began singing a sad tune in a muffled voice.

"Comrades, we must be going," Rachmatoff said.

Korjikoff did not keep them back. Polejaeff stopped playing and left the piano. Osetroff turned to go away. There was no one in the room besides Korjikoff and Polejaeff.

"Comrade, I shall ask you to stay," Korjikoff said. Polejaeff glanced at him as if he were looking into space and said in a low voice:

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"The law says: 'And slay the worthiest Gentile!' And is this one," asked Nika turning and pointing with his eyes at the Red guard's dead body—"is he the worthiest? Oh, you. . . ."

"How, you know. . . ." Korjikoff exclaimed with bewilderment, "you know. . . . It means that you too are initiated. . . . Come comrade, let us go to the Tcheka."

"Some other time, comrade," Polejaeff answered coldly. "I don't feel inclined today. I'm not in a mood for it."

X

POLEJAEFF occupied three rooms in a luxurious private house. He had managed to arrange them with the comfort to which he was accustomed. On coming home he found his bedroom-door by the light of the moon and entered his room. He had a Red guard orderly, but he did not wake him. He undressed in the dark, the electric light being allowed him in winter only for two hours daily. When he had undressed he lay down on his soft comfortable bed and felt that he was shivering feverishly.

"No, it can't go on like this," he thought. "It is impossible. . . . If I don't sleep nights I shan't be able to stand it for long. All my game is carried on nerves and if they break down? And how can they hold out when I have to work in a lunatic asylum? Korjikoff already suspects me. It is so easy to give one's self away; and at the same time today has given me so much. They are all Russians, everyone of them, Russians and not Internationalists, Russians and not communists. Maybe Gaiduk, Schlossberg and Jenny, but the last two don't count, they are mad. But Rachmatoff, Goloub, Osetroff, the musicians of Boudenniy's band and the officers—they all love Russia and long for the past. But they dare not speak because the cruel, bloody terror is hanging over them threateningly. A gang of scoundrels, such as Korjikoff, hold them in a tension of continual fear by such sallies as the one of today. We must place ourselves above them and today I have succeeded in doing so."

A shudder of intense repulsion passed over him. He saw the dead body and over it the beastly scene of passion. "One must

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be born a particular sort of being and brought up in a special way to be capable of such a thing."

"The barracks are full of curses. God and especially the Holy Virgin are being continually abused and outraged. They have created a similar literature and their poetry is written in the same style. The sacred officers, who have to tremble continually for their lives, as are being daily shot in great numbers in the Tchekas, are afraid of everything and press closer to the Red guards. They fear, but work nevertheless; they direct, train and drill the hungry, tattered men, leading them into battle; and die under the red flags. And there are no means to approach them. You can't get anything out of them. You can't learn anything. After today's experience they won't dare sing anymore. Korjikoff, Gaiduk, a few more scoundrels keep them in a state of eternal fear. The whole of Russia is terror-stricken and in wild dread loots, steals and jeers in her cynical corruption, horrified at her own abomination."

Polejaeff settled in his bed more quietly and turned to the window which was gradually growing lighter. The events of the last three months rose with painful lucidity in his feverishly excited brain.

The escape with Olia, Pavlik and Ermoloff from the wreck of Denikin's army. His long travel first as a fireman on board a ship, then as stevedore in the Odessa port, the trying journey to Petersburg by rail. His casual encounter with Osetroff, his cautious conversations with him and his joining the Petrograd commune. Polejaeff obtained a communistic passport and studied the communistic doctrine. Then his departure for the Polish front. Here he understood that the Polish war was for many a solution of the painful and difficult problem of being mobilized by force and of having to fight against one's own brothers for the Third International. The Polish war was a national war. Officers, Generals and many of the soldiers understood that the very existence of Poland was a menace to Russia's independence and the majority went to the frontiers of Germany hoping that after having come into touch with Germany, Russia would once more be healthy and strong.

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His mind ran on to later happenings :

A month ago Polejaeff had called on some friends of his in the Goročovaya. They lived in a communist apartment where three families related to each other, numbering eighteen people, occupied five rooms. That day the protection of Soviet officials, they all served in various Soviet offices, had procured them genuine tea and sugar. Someone had brought strawberries from the country. They had some flour at home and the young girls had cooked some sweet cakes. It was a real "bourgeois" tea. They joked, laughed and even sang to the accompaniment of a guitar, and a cottage piano. Several young girls were present, and an elderly gentleman, once a great liberal, who had written a treatise against criminal punishment. It was a white, clear night; the windows were open. Suddenly the throbbing of a motor-car penetrated the room and shots were fired at intervals.

"I think shooting is going on," one of the young girls said, holding a cake in her hand and seating herself on the windowsill.

"Yes, again," another one remarked coming up to the cottage piano.

"Kolia told me that twenty-eight officers were to be executed."

"Then it is probably they who are being shot," said the young girl who was sitting at the piano and who began playing a gay melody.

Polejaeff looked at them. Their faces were pale and sickly. Many of them wore thin shoes on bare feet, having no stockings. They all looked fagged out. But the desire to live was strongly rooted in them, not letting them realize that quite near people were being killed.

He remembered another scene. They had lived on muddy soup boiled of frozen potatoes and suddenly they captured a rich Polish town. His company, led by communists, dispersed in the houses; screams, shrieks were heard, lamentations, moans, one shot was fired, then another, afterwards all was silent. The streets had become empty, all had dispersed in the houses. An hour had passed when a Red guardsman, a communist, a hand-

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some fellow, the type of a cab-driver, flushed, smiling gaily, beckoned to Polejaeff.

"Come, comrade Commander . . . ours are already having a fine time."

The cream of the communists of the company had gathered in a wealthy house. The table was already served. The bewildered servants bustled about, carrying plates and glasses. In a corner of the room five young girls were sitting and lying on some carpets with their hands tied. Three of them were in school dresses with black aprons, the other two in neat white frocks. They were deathly pale and looked around with big frightened eyes. They were not crying, having no more tears left.

Osetroff, Polejaeff's regimental comrade managed the whole feast. Ham, which had been discovered somewhere or other was being placed on the table. Geese and mutton were being roasted in the kitchen.

"Wine! Women! Music!" was Osetroff's greeting when Polejaeff came into the room. "It was worth the fight, comrade!"

Gold, silver and jewelry were lying on a separate table in a heap: watches, bracelets, brooches, rings, cigarette-cases. . . .

The orgy lasted three days. When it was over the Red guardsmen had left the town and the house where they had been feasting. Three dead bodies of schoolgirls remained lying in a corner on the carpets; the two older girls were still breathing, they moaned and followed the retreating men with insane eyes. They were bodily and mentally ruined. The communists, on forsaking the town, spoke of the feasts they would arrange when they captured Warsaw and reached Vienna, Budapest and Paris!

The trying part of Polejaeff's position consisted in his never being alone. Although he had been given three rooms, other people lived in the same house as he did. His functions brought him continually into contact with people of the most various standings and he could not talk openly with any of them. In this terrible government no one looked each other in the eyes,

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no one said what they thought. Everyone spied on everyone else, a friend could not trust a friend and a father did not trust his son and this loneliness in the midst of a multitude of people was terrible indeed.

XI

THE morning after Korjikoff's party the men in the squadrons were rising listlessly after a heavy long sleep. The hot July day was well advanced, the horses were making the chains of their halters ring anxiously, gusts of warm wind swept the dust and the old straw in the regimental yard. But in the squadrons the men continued to loll in bed. It was not easy to rise with empty stomachs. In vain two young communists walked up and down the squadron screaming in shrill voices: "Rise comrades, it's time to clean!" But the comrades did not hurry: some pulling on their tattered blankets or military coats more closely about them, others sitting on their beds in underwear, scratching themselves meditatively. Abuses and curses sounded all over the place.

"Again someone has grabbed my boots. If it's you Rotoff, damn you, I'll make you pay for it!" said a red-haired fellow in a hoarse voice; he had a freckled face and narrow eyes like a pig's, surrounded with white eye-lashes.

"But why should we go and work without having eaten, comrade?" a pale-faced Red guard said, scratching himself and showing from beneath his shirt his yellow loins and his sunken stomach.

An officer stopped before him.

"Well, scoundrel, are you going to reason, and to grumble! You good for nothing!"

The Red guard was silent. But when the officer had moved away he muttered between his teeth:

"You are no better yourself! Only wait, you son of the devil. The time will come for us to settle our accounts. He has stuck Jewish stars on his sleeve and thinks himself no end of a nut. Just like a Tsar's officer!"

"A Tsar's officer knew his duty at least and was a gentleman

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and this one—what is he? A Jewish tailor,” said his neighbour, a thin soldier called Perejaroff, one of the musicians in Bouden-niy’s band. “We played last night at the commissar Korjikoff’s. Well they were all quite tipsy. His orderly happened to vex him and he shot him on the spot. The man had, no doubt, also a Christian soul!”

“It is not quite so, comrade,” rejoined his neighbour Loboff, pulling on his trousers. “Of course the political commissar behaved badly as regards the orderly. But about the soul, I saw it burn, this very soul, and I know that there is none.”

The horses were being led out to be groomed. Although it was summer time they had not quite lost their winter-coat yet; shaggy, thin, with big bellies and protruding ribs, they moved along sorrowfully, their halters sounding like fetters. The officer in command of the regiment, Goloub, true to his old habit of sergeant, was present. He was pensive. Heavy thoughts oppressed his mind, but he was afraid to think because his thoughts were frank counter-revolution and he knew but too well where it led to.

The soldiers of the squadron were divided into two different classes—the commissars and the mobilized men. Goloub knew that a communist soldier could not be touched. He would always pay one back, complain and report the smallest matter to the commissar which might easily result in degradation from the post of commanding officer to the rank of private and even lead to an execution in the Tcheka. The mobilized men were a herd, which was beaten and knocked about. Voices were heard shouting among the men: “The commissar, the commissar is coming!” Goloub turned pale with fright.

Korjikoff advanced gloomy and sullen. He had a head-ache after last night. His face was pale and sickly with dark rings under the eyes. No one could believe that he was only in his twenty-fifth year. He went round the men looking them straight in the faces, with his hands thrust in his pockets. Remembering the time he had served in Karpoff’s Don regiment, he saw that the horses here looked very different. He was passing before a dirty, thin horse which looked at him with lovely

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eyes. Evidently it had seen better days. Powerful, wide-boned, with a dull, black coat, with a tail which had once been cut short, but which now had grown unevenly, it looked at Korjikoff. Korjikoff stopped involuntarily.

"What is this black horse?" he carelessly asked Goloub, who was following him respectfully.

"The mare Leda. It is General Sablin's horse."

"Is it so . . ." Korjikoff said and was on the point of adding: "exterminate it."

Something had survived Sablin. Korjikoff remembered Sablin's daughter and wondered why she was being kept in Moscow and not sent over. He had demanded her removal to Petersburg immediately after her father's execution, but had been informed that she was sick with typhus. Later Korjikoff had gone away for the spring and had forgotten her. . . . "I'll have her brought if she is still alive. . . . And now this horse. . . . Why does it stare at me? . . ."

Korjikoff turned to leave the yard. When he was on the point of going out he was caught up by a Red guard.

The man was pale, his eyes were wandering restlessly and his English tunic hung on him as on a peg.

"Comrade Commissar," the man said overtaking Korjikoff. "Allow me to report."

They came out into the empty street. In the shade the smell of dampness and dirt was stronger. The Red guard looked around him. No one was in sight.

"This morning, when we were getting ready for work, Perejaroff, a mobilized Red Army man, belonging to no political party, started speaking before everyone of the Tsar and praising former times. It is dangerous. He criticized the present order of things. He said that under the Tsar they were given six lumps of sugar, that four kinds of fruit-marmalade could be obtained. He told of last night's occurrence, saying that a man had been killed without any reason."

"Who is Perejaroff?" asked Korjikoff stopping.

"He plays the clarinet in Boudenniy's band."

Korjikoff turned back sharply to the gates and shouted:

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"Comrade Commander, send the Red guards-man Perejaroff to the Tchresvitchaika today to be questioned."

Perejaroff dropped the bag of cut straw he was holding and lowered his ashen-grey face. He understood that he was doomed to die and tears rolled slowly down his thin cheeks.

Trotsky was to review the troops of the Petersburg garrison on the Field of Mars. He wanted to select detachments to be sent to the Crimean front. Strong gusts of cold wind blew from the gulf, bringing a smell of sea-weeds, freshness and autumn. The peoples' commissars liked reviews, but they were ashamed of showing it. That is why the ceremonial side of the reviews was treated with a certain affected carelessness. Trotsky was long overdue. A drizzling rain was falling. Pestretzoff was in command of the review. He sat heavily on a big horse; he was dressed in English equipment, wearing a big pointed cap, like a pilot's, with a red star. He looked important and proud. He rode round the ranks with General Samoïloff and stopped on the right flank of the Lettish regiment. "Do you remember," Samoïloff said most unexpectedly for everyone and still more so for himself, "how exact and punctual the Emperor was! He always came exactly at eleven, not a minute later."

No one answered, Pestretzoff looked round, scared and nervous and eyed his horse's ears suspiciously. It seemed that a horse might even betray in this damned land of treason and false reports.

A heavy grey armoured car with protruding machine-guns, followed by a red motor car, appeared near the Engineer Castle. It was occupied by several people in military coats and high caps.

"Present arms!" Pestretzoff shouted, galloping to the centre of the field.

The dark lines swayed all over it. The Red guardsmen were taking up their rifles.

"Attention!" Pestretzoff commanded in his habitual loud voice, forgetful of everything. He thought that the old field of Mars heard him, that immediately the bright May sun would

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show itself and he would behold the calm, clear face of the Leader of the Russian army.

He continued giving his commands, carried away by his enthusiasm. Old hungry Leda shrunk under him. Memories of other times rose in her mind. She thought that she was carrying not the baggy, heavy old man, but the slim Sablin, full of youthful buoyancy. She straightened her weak legs, dilated her delicate nostrils, threw her tail back and bent her back, ready to gallop, wherever she was ordered to go.

Trotsky got out of his car, wiped his wet glasses and then taking hold of the reins caught his stirrup awkwardly with his stiff foot.

The officers of the suite were mounting their horses.

The rain was heavier. The regiments were forming in the thick mud. The band of the Lettish regiment struck shrilly the first notes of the old, smart Tsar's march to which the regiments of the Imperial guard used to pass before the Emperor, under the swaying banners of the Two-headed Eagle. Marking time with exaggeration, the coursanti marched past Trotsky, but the smoothness and ease which can be only obtained by long drill and gymnastics were missing. The youthful faces were turned towards Trotsky and the red stars, damp with rain, shone brightly. They took small steps, they stamped their feet as boys do when playing at soldiers.

Pestretzoff, saluting Trotsky, galloped towards him and stopped, bending respectfully towards the military commissar. For him, who had served for nearly forty years in the Imperial Army it was evident that the standard of drill in the Red Army was low; he saw the ugly carriage of the men when they marched by on bent knees and it made him frown. "Such drill, such marching can please only Jews," he thought.

"Don't they march well, General?" Trotsky said, turning his face slightly towards him.

"Perfectly, Comrade Commissar," answered Pestretzoff drawing himself up and saluting with his sabre.

"Very well, comrades," screamed Trotsky in a screeching voice to the coursanti.

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The battalion having waited for the left step, answered in a shrill voice marking every syllable distinctly:

"We serve the people and the revolution," just as in former times the troops answered: "Happy to do our best, Your Imperial Majesty!"

Regiments followed upon regiments; and Polejaeff's squadron was approaching the saluting point.

As in a dream the empty space opened before him. He saw the first squadron moving away and beyond it Prince Oldenbourg's pink house in the grey fog and the low rolling clouds. He unsheathed his sabre and gave the word of command "march." The squadron moved and followed him, approaching Trotsky. For a moment Polejaeff ceased to realize his surroundings. He thought he was Their Majesties' page leading his squadron and that smart, rosy cheeked soldiers were coming after him. He looked back. Hungry horses were trotting listlessly through the mud. Grey soldiers' faces were looking gloomily from under flat caps on which shone brilliant, bloody stars.

"Salute, why don't you salute," Goloub shouted hoarsely at him.

Polejaeff lifted his sword to his chin stiffly and mechanically and then lowered it and turned his head. Against the background of the dark foliage of the Summer Garden a group of horsemen were outlined. Two armed cars were standing behind it. One figure stood out of this group. Polejaeff saw a big brown head piece fitting the wearer's head like a cap and beneath it a little face with a small goat's beard. He thought that he saw a devil and that the brown cap hid the horns. A cold shiver ran down his spine and he murmured under his breath: "Oh! Lord, forgive! Forgive and save us!"

"Very well, comrades!" came from the group and the Red guardsmen answered behind Polejaeff "we serve the people and the revolution!"

XII

PRAYER and music soothed Polejaeff's heart-ache and moral sufferings. He would play melodies from operas and operettas from memory in the cold drawing-room, sing old melodies, or compose, surrounding himself with visions of the past. The room was dark. He played and sang, forgetting the time, not noticing how the evening passed into night and how the wind gradually abated.

The drawing-room door, which like all the rest of the doors in the apartment had no lock, opened and the dark figure of a tall man crept into the room, bringing with it a smell of leather, rain and the cold of the autumn night.

Polejaeff stopped playing and peered in the dusk at the intruder who named himself.

"Osetroff," he said. "Excuse me for coming without being called. I was sitting upstairs listening to your music. I am so utterly miserable, I came to listen. Forgive me."

Polejaeff began playing a nocturne. Osetroff sat down in an arm-chair at the corner of the piano and disappeared in the dusk.

"Please comrade, won't you sing the melody you sang last time at Korjikoff's. The one about the brigand who repented and entered a monastery."

Polejaeff complied readily and began singing in a hushed voice.

"Did it really happen or is it only a legend?" Osetroff asked Polejaeff when he had finished playing.

"It is the people who have made up that song," Polejaeff answered.

"I think it is true. Oh, comrade, if it were not true one would not have the strength to live. A terrible sadness oppresses me. At nights I have no peace. Visions persecute me. . . . Yes, that's how the thing happened. Shortly before the revolution Knoop introduced me . . . he was an officer, . . . a Jew. The soldiers killed him . . . in Kerensky's time when the officers were being exterminated. Well, he introduced me to my regi-

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mental Commander's wife. I fell desperately in love with her. I treated her like a cad, insulted her and she had to submit to everything. Gaiduk, the present agent of the Tcheka outraged her also. . . . But then General Sablin came from the front, he took her away and hid her. It was said that he had taken her to Finland. Last year Sablin was tortured and shot and there was no one to help her any more. Her husband had been killed by the soldiers without cause at the time of the first revolution under Kerensky. Her personal belongings and her furniture were kept in a store-house; I knew it and I arranged with Schlossberg that by order of the Tcheka whoever happened to apply for these things should be arrested and brought to us. She came last March. She had been sent out of Finland with her little eight-year-old girl. She was famished and without any means. She had scarcely any clothes because she had sold all she possessed. She was brought to the Tcheka. We had settled with Schlossberg that she was to be taken to Korjikoff's to be examined and I, of course, was there. She was just as fair and as lovely as ever. I felt that my old passion had not died. We four locked ourselves up—Korjikoff, I, she and the little girl. I pretended that I had repented. She felt it was not true and refused to touch anything I offered her, but she could not stop the child from eating. The little girl was rosy and looked healthy—it was evident she had denied herself everything, but had fed her child. Well, a mother. . . . Korjikoff teased the child and amused himself giving her sweets and making her say nasty words and curses against the Lord and Our Lady. The child screamed at him: 'Stop, Uncle, you daren't say such wicked things about God!' The mother tossed about the room like a caged bird, crying and wringing her hands, but not saying a word. Korjikoff outraged the child first, then I wanted to do the same, but I saw that she was cold . . . she had died. Well, comrade, since that very day I have had no peace. I see her continually before me. I came into my room yesterday—it was day-light. But there she was, sitting in an arm-chair with her chestnut hair down her back. She looked at me and I understood her to say by the movement of her lips, though

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no sound passed them: 'Give me my child back. Give me my Valia!' and then she vanished. . . . And now, comrade, I am always frightened."

Osetroff stopped speaking. The drawing-room was silent. The Neva groaned behind the windows and the waves splashed angrily, breaking against the granite parapet.

Polejaeff got a note from Korjikoff. "Comrade," the commissar wrote, "a few friends are coming to dine at my place today at seven o'clock. Comrade Vorotnikoff has brought a sturgeon from the Don. We will tackle it. Won't you come? With communistic greetings. Victor Korjikoff."

Some internal change was taking place in Korjikoff which he could not explain. He experienced an intense sadness and spiritual depression which he vainly tried to drown in alcohol, cocaine, debauchery and blood. Tania Sablin had been brought from Moscow, but the agent of the Tcheka who had taken her to the Extraordinary Commission in the Goročovaya street had written to Korjikoff saying that the girl was not worth his attention: she was thin, yellow and in fact as terrible as death itself. Korjikoff answered curtly "exterminate her" and did not even go to see his sister.

He was fed up with everything. He had experienced everything, had tasted everything and was disenchanted in everything. He yearned for something unusual, but could not find it. He had publicly outraged the relics of saints, but his conscience did not trouble him; he had danced and defiled churches, experiencing nothing but boredom. Sablin's pale face was constantly before him and he was dismayed, that although tears had rolled down his cheeks, he had never emitted a groan and had not asked for mercy. "And Polejaeff is like him," he thought. "They possess a greater moral force than we do. But why don't they resist? Isn't it yet time? And when it does come?" At such thoughts a feeling of terror would seize Korjikoff. "Is Polejaeff a communist? Devil only knows! He behaves so smartly and manages his squadron so well and does not fear death. Everyone is delighted with him. His papers and letters have all been examined, he never visits anyone and has no

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friends. Rachmatoff and Osetroff only swear by him. Gaiduk himself said once: 'With such a brain, such a will and firmness of character as comrade Polejaeff's he ought to be an agent of the Extraordinary Commission and not serve in a Red regiment.' What we all commit under the influence of cocaine, he, if necessary will do in cold blood."

"But he does not do it," Korjikoff retorted nervously.

"He probably finds it unnecessary. He spares his strength. When we will be finished men he will yet be strong."

"Well, I'll make him do it!" Korjikoff hissed. . . .

The dinner was a great success. Korjikoff had commanded a cook who had formerly served a Grand Duke and ordered him to manage everything as he had done for his former master. The crockery and the servants also came from a palace. Vorotnikoff had sent the wine of the best Cossack Don vintages and the brandy had been obtained from the commissar of peoples' welfare. Champagne was served after a fine joint of veal. The company numbered thirty guests.

Korjikoff sat at the head of the table. He was gloomy and thoughtful and spoke to no one. Vorotnikoff sat on his right, and Rachmatoff—the military specialist—on his left. Schlossberg sat beside him, then came Jenny, Polejaeff, Baby Drantsoff, Gouloub, two young officers of the communist regiment, Gaiduk, Mimi Granilin, several communist officers of Korjikoff's regiment and Vorotnikoff's aides-de-camp.

After dinner Bourdenniy's band played and sang. Korjikoff either sat in a corner near the window or paced up and down the room silently.

A famous opera singer had been invited and his powerful bass voice filled the hall with melodies of revolutionary songs, of the well-known "Doubinoushka" and other Russian folk songs.

"And will you sing 'God save the Tsar?'" Korjikoff asked him looking him straight in the eyes. Polejaeff was close to the singer.

"If you order it," the singer answered pulling himself up like a soldier. "Hunger will force you to do anything."

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"Well, well I am joking," Korjikoff said in a softer tone. Then he added nodding his head at Polejaeff: "There, he will sing it without being hungry."

Korjikoff moved away and joined Gaiduk.

"For what o'clock has it been fixed?" he asked.

"For twelve," Gaiduk said.

"At my place?"

"Yes."

Korjikoff looked at his watch. It was a quarter to twelve.

"Comrade Osetroff," he said. "You will come with me."

Osetroff bowed his handsome curly head.

Korjikoff came up quite close to Polejaeff.

"And you, comrade, will also come with us."

Korjikoff's eyes expressed a tenderness and gentleness which Polejaeff had never noticed before.

"Where to?" Polejaeff asked.

"To the Extraordinary Commission," Korjikoff answered gently.

"Why?" Polejaeff demanded dryly.

"You have never yet been present at a Bolshevik trial. It is instructive. Today we will judge eighteen White-Guard Officers and one woman, a society girl, who wanted to save the Tsar. She was busy carrying on excavation work in Ekaterinburg. She is my sister—Tatiana Sablin. So come with us and you shall see how the thing is done. We have been eating and drinking, we have indulged in ices and champagne—all very bourgeois enjoyments, now we will drink human blood and flatter our proletarian tastes."

Polejaeff was pale, but calm. He had surrendered himself to the Lord's will. If it were his fate to meet Tania under such extraordinary conditions in the Tcheka at the hour of her execution, if he were doomed to die a tragical death with her, let it be so; yet he would save her from dishonour.

"All right," he said. "It is quite interesting. I have never witnessed an execution."

"Would you like some cocaine," Korjikoff whispered into his

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ear, "you may try to shoot them yourself. It is pleasant . . . thrilling. If you wish, we will take Jenny with us."

"I don't know," Polejaeff drawled, speaking as in a dream. "Maybe, why not? . . . I suppose it must be a strong emotion."

"Yes," murmured Korjikoff, "and, if you like, we can place all the condemned men in a line and we will pass our time with the girls, I with Jenny and you with my sister. Eh? And let them look on. Or else we will make them. . . . Let them enjoy themselves before being shot."

"Well, we can always think of something when we are out there," murmured Polejaeff, not hearing his own voice.

"Comrades," Korjikoff said. "Eat, drink and be merry. We shall leave you for half an hour. I thirst for pleasure, and to serve the revolution. Come along Jenny, Gaiduk, Osetroff, Polejaeff."

XIII

A DETACHMENT of Red guards was crowding at the gates. Rachmatoff's powerful car was standing before the front-door. Korjikoff and those who had come with him went into the yard. A lorry was standing there and chauffeurs, dressed in costly fur-coats, all of them members of the Tcheka, were fussing round it. The big basement, which had formerly served as cellar, was brightly illuminated. The electric light shone through small narrow windows into the yard, lighting up the frozen flags and the narrow stone foot-path. A Red Army man carrying a rifle stood at the door of the basement. The entrance was narrow, with very steep steps. Polejaeff quite unconsciously remarked everything most carefully. He noticed that the motor-lorry blocked the way between the entrance and the detachment, that the gates leading into the street were open, that Rachmatoff's chauffeur, whom he knew, was in his seat. Polejaeff noticed even that he was pale and agitated. He was a young technical student, who had entered Rachmatoff's service so as to keep his mother and three little brothers.

The basement was low vaulted, and two arches divided it into three parts. Several Army men were standing in the first part.

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They stood at attention when the commissar and the agents entered the basement. A sofa, two arm-chairs, a small inlaid table, were placed in the middle, which had been well swept. Two bottles and some glasses, biscuits, cigars and cigarette-boxes were standing on the table. A sentry had been placed to guard these treasures. A carpet and embroidered Caucasian cushions were lying on the floor before the couch. In the third part of the basement a thin line of emaciated people, wearing nothing but soiled, shabby underclothing were digging with big spades a narrow, deep ditch, watched by Red Army men.

Korjikoff was unnaturally excited; the pale-faced Jenny, continually smelling cocaine, came up at once to the table, nervously poured herself out a glass of brandy, and swallowed it in one gulp. Her face expressed disgust. The air was heavy with the fetid odour of dampness, human sweat and of uncleanness. Gaiduk was pale, but composed and exaggeratedly attentive. He seemed to be on the watch. Polejaeff looked at Osetroff. He, who habitually was quite tipsy at parties and at this hour of the night, today was perfectly sober, calm and resolute. He looked attentively and earnestly at Polejaeff, and Nika read friendship and resolution in his glance.

"It is very well managed," Korjikoff said. "I hardly expected it to be so well done."

He walked over the carpet, lit a cigar and said turning to Polejaeff:

"Today you are my guest and I want to show you everything. You will make a fine Tchekist with your strong nerves. You need only practice your hand at it, and then it is quite easy. Let us walk round. Attention, stop digging"—he screamed turning towards the wall.

The people stopped working and stood up against the wall. They were human beings who no longer looked like living people. On the right hand stood a young fellow of about twenty years of age. His face was so emaciated that it seemed a skull fixed on to his thin neck. His cheeks were sunken, his lips so dry, that they were hardly visible. His yellow body showed through the holes of his shirt, his ribs standing out sharply.

His thin, white legs had a pitiful aspect, standing on the damp, freshly dug-up soil. He looked without winking at Polejaeff with his big black legs, and Nika thought that he had seen this tall, thin youth somewhere before. Next to him stood an old man with a big stomach. He wore an old but clean shirt, and made of good linen. His stout neck was bare and his full legs were red from an unhealthy rush of blood. He kept his grey eyes fixed on the approaching group. Further down was an elderly, bearded man of sullen appearance in spectacles. He was badly built and thin. Behind him stood a middle-aged man, who carried himself well and gazed at the Tchekists with an unflinching and sharp look. He continually pulled at his shirt and drawers as if ashamed of his untidy appearance.

A woman was standing at the opposite end. Polejaeff only recognized her when he had passed half the line of men, and from that moment he never took his eyes off her, gradually recognizing the dear features. The corn-flower blue eyes alone reminded him of the old Tania. Her hair had been clipped after the typhus she had gone through and now stuck up straight on her head, surrounding her lovely face with the golden halo of a martyr. Her face was bloodless. Her pale cheeks were sunken. Her rounded chin expressed will and strength and her lips had the blue tinge of a corpse. The dark, delicate eyebrows and the large eyes, shaded by dark lashes, stood out on the white face. She wore only a long peasant's shirt. But it was clean and neat and hung in loose folds, like the chiton of a martyr, round her emaciated body. Her little bare feet, soiled with earth, shrunk nervously on the ground. She shivered from cold. Her eyes were lifted heavenward, and she did not notice the approaching group. She was lost in prayer. Her small hands with their tapering fingers were folded on her chest.

Polejaeff looked at her intently; under his gaze she turned her head towards him and their eyes met. Polejaeff was clothed in a service-coat and wore a big red star on his cap. Tania looked at him for some time, her delicate brows knitted over her lovely blue eyes. Suddenly they expressed terror, horror, disgust and scorn, and sighing heavily she turned away and once more lifted

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her eyes. She clenched her hands in a gesture of despair and her lips murmured words of prayer. What was she praying about?

"And this is my half-sister," Korjikoff said, but Polejaeff interrupted him.

"A fine assortment, real Christian martyrs," he said, trying to stand between Korjikoff and Tania.

Korjikoff looked at him gloomily and repeated slowly, sounding each syllable.

"Yes, they are martyrs."

He broke into shrill laughter like a madman. He then turned back sharply and went towards the couch.

"Here you see before you, comrade Polejaeff, the ordinary job of a real Tchekist," he said puffing at his cigar. "Today it is even a small one. The number generally varies between thirty and sixty. Do you remember, Gaiduk, we once had eighty?"

"Eighty-two," Gaiduk answered calmly. "That was after the attempt on Lenin."

"There are different ways of shooting them," Korjikoff said in a business-like tone, slowly taking off his coat lined with costly fur and remaining in his leather jacket. "You can place them either with their faces or their backs to the wall. You can also make them lie face-downwards in the graves they have dug and shoot them in the backs of their heads. You can also mock them before killing them, as comrade Dora does, or else they can be outraged first, as the coarse Red Army men generally do. You know, comrade, no one is viler than the common Russian people. They are capable of any baseness. I must say that I personally am sick of it all, it does not interest me any more. . . . But to be capable of experiencing passion I must have killed someone before. I love the horror of what people are used to call sin. I love something excessive. That's what I have planned for tonight. That woman over there is my sister, well, I don't fancy her, her eyes are so saintly and that's something I don't like. Jenny is Gaiduk's mistress. . . . Well, first I will kill a few and then you can have a try. It's

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quite easy. Then we will share the women. I shall take my sister and you Jenny, in a pool of blood amid corpses and in the presence of all the others, that won't be bad."

"All right," said Polejaeff. "I will see what I can do."

A plan was already shaping itself in his head. He glanced at Osetroff, who returned his gaze, looking at him with the bold and devoted expression of a faithful dog, and then unfastened his holster.

In the front of the basement the Red Army men were noisily dividing the victims' clothes. Jenny was sprawling on the couch, looking through her half closed, narrow eyes at the pink liquid in her glass. Korjikoff took out his large army-revolver and walked slowly towards the line of people. Polejaeff followed him, but without arms. After him came Gaiduk, always keeping his eyes on Korjikoff. He had unfastened his holster and half drawn his revolver out. Osetroff came just behind him, revolver in hand.

The long line of people in their under-clothes formed a white blur in Polejaeff's eyes, and out of it he only saw Tania's uplifted blue eyes. Dead silence reigned in this part of the basement.

"Start the motor!" Gaiduk shouted addressing no one in particular.

Someone invisible, who was but a dark spot in the night's fog and who was standing at the door, repeated in a hoarse voice:

"Start the motor."

And the dull roar of the car filled the yard.

Korjikoff, treading stealthily like a cat and carrying his revolver behind his back, approached the young man who was looking into space. The cigar which Korjikoff was holding between his teeth sent out a thin spiral of bluish smoke. The old man looked at Korjikoff with terror and with prayer. Further on the other victims seemed to sway like visions.

"Why are you staring, old man?" Korjikoff asked. "Don't expect mercy."

"He is my son and he is innocent!" the old man murmured. "Spare him, don't kill him before my own eyes!"

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"This can easily be done, Mr. General," Korjikoff remarked sneeringly and taking his cigar out of his mouth applied the burning end first to one of the old man's eyes and then to the other.

The cigar hissed and went out. With a groan of pain the old man leaned against the wall.

"How vile!" the young man exclaimed.

"Shut up, puppy!" Korjikoff screamed out and rapidly passing his revolver from his left hand to the right fired straight at the young man's forehead. The youth swayed to the wall, knocked against it and bending forward fell to the old man's feet. While the father was bending over him Korjikoff killed the old man firing at his bare nape.

The bearded man with glasses turned impulsively to the wall convulsed by heavy sobs. Korjikoff aimed carefully at his throbbing head and fired at last at his back in the dirty close-fitting shirt. The man's body continued to throb, Korjikoff fired at it a second time with a grimace of disgust.

"I die for my faith, my Tsar and my country!" the tall man with the strong face said firmly.

"Well die then, hound!" and Korjikoff fired straight into his open mouth.

Someone began sobbing hysterically, but Polejaeff saw that it was not Tania. She was lost in prayer and he thought that her slender figure was on the point of tearing itself away from the dirty ground and to float heavenward. Two white shadows dropped down unconscious.

Korjikoff moved along continuing to fire. Polejaeff counted the cartridges. The seventh shot was fired and Korjikoff slipped the revolver into its holster. He then got out an immense parabellum, surveyed it lovingly and said, offering it to Polejaeff:

"This is my favourite, won't you try it?"

Polejaeff took it. He quickly exchanged glances with Ose-troff, who was still looking at him firmly with the eyes of a faithful dog.

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"The chief thing is to keep cool," Korjikoff said. "The hand must be steady, but even if you miss, it won't matter much."

"I am perfectly calm," Polejaeff said, not hearing his own voice. He heard the faint moans of the bearded man, who was still breathing and someone's shrill cries of: "It's impossible! It's a nightmare! I acknowledge Lenin! Let me go! I will do anything you want!"

A vile curse and abuse accompanied by coarse laughter came from the group of Red guardsmen. The motor was throbbing in the yard.

Polejaeff raised his revolver rapidly and shot straight at Korjikoff's face.

At the same instant a second shot rang out. Osetroff had fired at Gaiduk's back.

Polejaeff thought that dead silence had followed these two shots and that time had stopped. But it was not so. The soldiers continued to quarrel and scold. The motor throbbed and someone screamed out hysterically: "We are saved!"

Polejaeff in one wild stride was beside Tania and caught her in his arms. She seemed wonderfully light. Osetroff rolled her in Korjikoff's fur coat, which the latter had thrown on the couch, and then they both dashed towards the door.

"What has happened, comrade?" asked the sentry, who was standing on the narrow staircase, and barring them the way.

"The commissar has fainted," Osetroff answered, pushing him aside and helping to carry Tania, who was rolled in the commissar's coat with the red band on its sleeve.

The motor was working noisily in the yard. Red guards were sitting and standing before the open gates. Rachmatoff's chauffeur was sitting in the car, staring fixedly before him.

"Comrade," Polejaeff called out to him, placing the unconscious Tania at the bottom of the car. "Take us to my house as fast as possible."

Osetroff jumped into the car.

"Nikolai Nikolaevitch, let us go to my place. I have all she may require. I have a lot of gold and we will start this very night."

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"All right, Misha," Polejaeff answered, calling Osetroff for the first time by his pet-name.

The car moved softly, rolling silently on the frozen road.

A minute later a group of people in under-clothes rushed out of the gates into the street and started running, followed by a crowd of soldiers, firing, while someone was screaming wildly:

"The commissar is killed, the commissar . . ." accompanying these screams by terms of extreme abuse.

In the basement five dead, half-clad bodies, lay on the up-turned soil beside the ditch, a sixth body was moaning softly, moving its hand.

Near by Korjikoff was lying with his arms thrown out. His face, smashed and burnt, was nothing but a bloody hole. One of the men had already robbed him of his revolver and of one of his boots. Gaiduk's body lay beside Korjikoff's. Jenny was sitting near him, gazing into the dead man's face with raving eyes.

The brandy, liquor, cakes, cigars and cigarettes had all disappeared from the table, which was lying overturned. The electric lights burnt brightly.

The Red guards were hastily packing the big carpet, which they had brought out of the basement, into the lorry. The chauffeurs were drinking the brandy and the liquors straight out of the bottles. Through the lighted windows of Korjikoff's apartment in the second story one could see his guests. Two pairs were moving round the table—Mimi Granilin and Baby Drantsoff were dancing with Vorotnikoff's aides-de-camp.

Life in the Republic of the Soviets was following its normal course.

Tania regained consciousness in the cold night-air. She moved at the bottom of the car hiding her bare feet. Polejaeff wrapped them up carefully in the folds of the coat and lifted her to the seat.

"Don't worry, my dear young lady," Osetroff told her gently. "It won't take us long to reach my home and once there I will give you all you need. I have a pair of fur-lined boots, a coat of real astrachan fur, a fur cap, a shawl and we will wrap you

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up warmly. We will dress you like a princess and then we will escape abroad."

"Who are you?" Tania asked in a weak voice. She spoke so indistinctly that Polejaeff could only guess what she had asked.

"I thought, Tatiana Alexandrovna, that you had recognized me," Nika replied.

Tania moaned softly. She opened her eyes wide and asked in a low, but firm voice:

"How do you come to be here, Nikolai Nikolaevitch?"

Since childhood she had always called him Nika as he had always called her Tania, and now by addressing him so formally by his first name and patronymic a gulf was formed between them of sombre suspicion and of fear on one side and supplication to understand and forgive on the other.

"The Lord has guided me here and he has saved you. He will also save Russia . . ." Polejaeff said.

Tania did not say anything. His reference to God appeased her. She settled more comfortably and gazed into space. Polejaeff saw her eyes, grown unnaturally large, shine in the darkness, he saw her deathly pale face and felt how she shuddered in Korjikoff's warm coat.

The car stopped soon. They had arrived.

"Wait a minute," Osetroff said. "I must put things straight."

The car stood motionless in the frozen street. Polejaeff listened anxiously. Danger might overtake them at any minute. The commissar's and the Tcheka agent's murder were certainly known in Korjikoff's apartment by now. A pursuit was to be expected. The red flame of a candle flashed in one of the windows of the second story and then a dark blind was dropped upon it. Osetroff came running down with a pair of warm felt-boots and a civilian hat for Polejaeff.

"Slip them on, Miss," he said, "the stairs are damp and dirty."

A red soldier with a rifle had come up to the car with Osetroff.

"He will watch meanwhile," Osetroff remarked. "If you

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see anyone coming," Osetroff said to the soldier, "a patrol or a crowd, fire immediately into the air. Do you understand?"

"I understand," the man replied sullenly.

"I also will stay here," Polejaeff said.

"All right, maybe it is safer," Osetroff answered.

He offered Tania his arm and guided her respectfully across the yard and up the back staircase. She followed him obediently.

"Please, be careful, Miss, there is yet a step," Osetroff said.

The door of the flat was open and a light was burning dimly in the third room.

"Here, Miss. I have got you all I had. Eat, please. I will go and warm you some tea."

Osetroff had placed a plate with smoked fish and bread on the table, and opening the drawers of a big chest began tossing on the couch big bundles of batiste and silk underwear, stockings, petticoats, blouses and ball-dresses.

"Choose whatever you like," Osetroff said. "And then let us start without losing time. Don't fear; no one will come in."

He left the room closing the door after him.

Tania was alone in the big room dimly lit by the solitary candle. She sat down on the low, broad bed-stead of white birch-wood, decorated with bronze, over which was carelessly thrown a blue-padded quilt. Heaps of dresses and underwear were lying on the couch and on the carpet. The candle, burning in a dirty brass candlestick, was standing on the dressing table with an elegant toilet set and a big mirror. A soft upholstered decorated chair stood before it. A plate with some badly smelling fish and two pieces of stale black bread was standing on the table.

"Whose room was this? Who slept on this bed?" Tania wondered, "to whom did these stockings, this underclothing and these dresses belong?"

There was nothing suitable for a journey and for a flight. All these elegant transparent chemises, embroidered in flowers and intricate designs undressed more than they clothed. They spoke of passion and corruption and had been brought here

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for this purpose. A spicy odour of old perfume came from the underwear. Some of the chemises had been worn and not washed. "When and where had they been taken off? Maybe in just the same kind of basements, before executions?"

Tania's small, rough fingers trembled. At last she chose three new chemises which she thought more decent and then, having taken off her shirt, which was more like a shroud, carefully slipped on the three chemises. The touch of the fragrant batiste was pleasant to the emaciated body and reminded her of old times.

The silk stockings were very thin, open worked and embroidered. Tania put on three pairs of stockings and still her feet were no warmer. She put on high boots, several petticoats, a blouse, she brushed her dishevelled hair and fixed it with a tortoise-shell comb, and after having dressed felt calmer. She took a piece of bread and began eating it. . . . An animal warmth spread in her veins. The room, lit by a meagre solitary candle, with the luxurious bed and the heaps of sweetly-smelling underwear scattered about seemed to her like a dream.

Someone knocked at the door. Osetroff asked:

"May I come in?"

"Come in," Tania replied.

"I have brought you some tea," Osetroff said coming into the room and placing three cups of tea on the dressing-table. "All the three are for you. I did it to gain time. Every minute is precious. Drink it quickly and let us start."

Tania felt more herself after the tea. She wrapped an expensive Orenbourg shawl round her shoulders, then threw on a sable stole and over it put on a wide Astrachan cloak.

"That's right, Miss. It will all be useful, maybe you will have to live upon it for many years and I don't need it," Osetroff said helping her on first with one thing and then another.

Complying with Osetroff's injunctions Tania put on Korjikoff's coat on the top of all and moving with difficulty she went after him. Osetroff descended the stairs before her, carrying the candle and lighting the steps. It was still quiet in the street. The pale-faced chauffeur was sitting in his seat. Polejaeff and

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Jelieskin were standing beside the car, peering anxiously into the dark night. Two shots were fired a few blocks away and then all was silent once more. The big city seemed to be lying in waiting, holding its breath anxiously in the nightly torpor.

"At last," Polejaeff murmured.

"It's all right, comrade, I have taken a passport for her and for us too."

"No one has seen you?"

"The comrades know. But it doesn't matter now. Jelieskin, are you coming with us?"

"Yes, I will come with you, Michail Sergeievitch."

"Let us start and may God bless us!"

This long forgotten Russian expression sounded oddly in the night's silence coming from under a cap with a Red star badge. The chauffeur turned round and looked at Osetroff.

"Go ahead, friend, and drive along the Zabalkansky into the Peterhoff road. Will we have enough essence to reach Oranienbaum?"

"Yes," the chauffeur said, starting the car.

The dark town rushed towards them. The car with its faintly burning lamps swayed and jumped in the holes and ridges of the bad road. People were sauntering near the barracks and drunken cries and shrieks could be heard. A woman was crying and cursing, endeavouring to free herself from Red guards who had caught her. The nearer they came to the suburbs the more deserted were the streets. Not a soul was to be seen on the Obvodny Canal devoid of barges or boats. Several dark shadows with bags and parcels slipped by hurriedly near the Baltic station and an engine was whistling hoarsely behind the high station fence. Then came the freshness of the fields, the smell of decaying cabbage in the vegetable gardens, the strong smell of water, rushes and of the sea. The car was rolling along the Peterhoff road. They drove past empty spaces, mile-stones, spreading leafless birches with white trunks, rustling willows growing on the banks of ditches. It smelt of marshes. Then came gardens, villas, the white gates of the Sergieff Monastery; the road was better and firmer, the pools were covered with

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thin, shining ice, which cracked under the weight of the passing car. Then once more came villas, parks with dark trees, sheds of fire-brigades, a stone-bridge over sluices with the water rushing noisily and tumbling down in a water-fall, and to the left spread the dark expanse of the Strelna lake, and then once more came villas, fields and the road passed between the bushes and the trees of the Michailovsky and Znamensky parks. The car drove between two stone-pillars of an old gateway and the trees of the Alexandria Park pressed closely on both sides of the road. The air smelt of moss, fir trees and dampness. The car jumped over the bad pavement of the Peterhoff streets and once more they passed villas, then came the palace, the big square. . . .

How well Tania knew it all. She had known it since early childhood and it was very dear to her. Witnesses of her games with her brother Kolia were passing rapidly before her. How many memories were roused in her by the sight of the dark pines and the mysterious fir-trees of the Peterhoff parks! She had ridden her pony here with her father and mother, here she had driven in a chaise and here as a child she had learned to venerate the Imperial family. . . . Visions of her father, her mother, her brother, their horses, her darling pony "Ralph" pressed round her. But they were concealed by the vision of one who reigned over them all. The vision of the Tsar and the visions of all the other Tsars rose before Tania as the car rushed along, approaching Peterhoff. And they had all died!

Visions of a recent past rose before Tania's mind. The murder of the Tsar and his family, the burnt-out glade in the dense forest and her searches for a proof which would let her hope that the abomination, which was whispered about by everyone in Ekaterinburg, was not true.

Then the two years passed with Koltchak's army. The suffering caused by the knowledge that those who worked for Russia's salvation, who called themselves "Whites"—also spoke badly of the Tsar, repeating continually—"a return to the past is impossible." But what was to replace this past? Koltchak was betrayed by the Allies and the Czecho-Slovaks and

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murdered dastardly. It was abject, vile. . . . Blood, treason and baseness were everywhere. Then came a life of concealment in a Siberian village and the slow journey to the South. The attempt to escape somewhere where a Russia still existed which could live openly, which was not tortured, not devoured by lice, not succumbing from putrid wounds, not tracked and not flooded in blood, but a Russia which was free, where the national Russian colors waved proudly and where it was possible to speak of the past.

Tania had a protector. It was a Red Army man, who was in love with her. It was he, a miserable, half savage being, with a wide, strong-jawed, pox-marked face, who had accompanied and led her like a watchful nurse through boiling Russia and had brought her safely to Moscow.

Then came the meeting with Pestretzoff. . . . He had told her that her father had agreed to serve in the Red Army. After that, life with an aunt of hers in a flat on the Arbat, occupied also by workers and soldiers. She had lived on Pestretzoff's casual gifts and on money obtained from the sale of her aunt's last possessions. . . .

Then she was arrested and imprisoned with thirty other women; she had seen how they had succumbed, forced by hunger, and were tempted to take up service in the Soviet Government. Then came the news of her father's torture and death.

One morning, her adorer, the Red Army man, Thomas Sissin, came to see her. Even he had aged and had grown thinner. His round, potted face, with its heavy jaw, clean-shaven and without eyebrows, making it look like a woman's, had grown still uglier.

"I have brought you a louse, comrade," he said, producing a small box. It's a fine typhoid one, I got it from a comrade and paid a lot of money for it. It has been tested. Whomever it bites is sure to fall ill. It's such a fine louse! . . . So I got it for you."

"But why do I need it?" Tania said shuddering.

The round, pale face approached hers. The big mouth opened showing a row of rotten teeth.

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"Orders have been received to send you to Petersburg. A commissar wishes to have you for his mistress . . . But I won't have it. I want you to remain pure. If you can't be mine—no one else shall have you."

Sissin spoke quite openly, calling everything by its course, peasant name, expressing himself as everyone did in this State, where shame existed no more.

"So you just take this louse and let it creep on your body and you will fall ill of typhoid and they'll leave you alone."

Tania took the louse; she fell ill with typhoid, she lay in the hospital with a cropped head and was at death's door . . .

The twentieth century . . . Civilization and culture . . . Now she is driving in a car . . . Silky underwear presses softly to her body, costly fur is wrapped round her neck.

They had been driving for an hour and a half and she had not spoken a word with Nika. She dreaded to learn the details, she feared to be told, that he, whom she loved so dearly, was with them, that he served under the Red Flag, that he had bowed to Satan.

She was brought back to reality. The car had stopped in a field. The shore was quite near. Gusts of wind moaned and sung in the ears and the waves roared dully.

"Well, friend, are you also coming with us?" Nika said, addressing the chauffeur.

The man looked at Polejaeff, his face was pale. He was going through an internal struggle.

"No", he said dully. "I can't go, my mother and my little brothers are there . . ."

"But what will you do?" Polejaeff asked.

"Let me go. I will come back to Rachmatoff and tell him everything. They won't have time to catch you before the morning, and once there, you don't risk anything."

"Well, let it be so", Osetroff said. "He is right, if he escapes, his mother will be killed. Let him tell everything, he will manage all right. Please, alight, Miss. And you know what, Nikolai Nikolaevitch? You stay here with the young lady and Jelineskin and I will go and look for Toporkoff. If we all go we

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will frighten him. You see, I have already arrested him twice, but he always paid for his release. He belongs to us . . . He takes people over to the other side. He charges ten thousand Tsar's roubles per head. He drinks heavily after each crossing. He was an officer of the guard in the old army. He is a nobleman, a bourgeois! . . . So good-bye for the present. Answer me when you hear me shout:—Hop, hop!”

The car turned back and disappeared in the dusk of the night. Polejaeff and Tania remained alone.

XIV

“NIKA, how did you come to serve them?” Tania asked sitting down on a big stone on the shore.

Night surrounded them. Dark clouds drifted across the sky; when they were torn assunder the moon cast its silver rays over the troubled sea revealing in its light the white-crested waves, the sandy shore, the broken black rushes, the shrubs with their ragged leaves, bent by gusts of wind, and then everything disappeared once more in the darkness. Close by, the dark forest rustled noisily and the black pines moaned as if complaining of their fate. Not a light could be seen, and no fires of passing ships were on the sea. The white-crested waves rolled hissing and muttering dully; they rose black and shaggy, fringed with foam, then bending rushed straight at Tania and fell suddenly, murmuring humbly on the sand at her feet.

It was warm and cozy sitting in the fur-coat, the wind did not penetrate through the woolen shawl and beneath it her cheeks burnt feverishly. Tania listened to Nika telling her all the events of the last three years.

The figure in the soldier's coat and fur-cap nestled up closer to him. Large eyes gazed up at him and only they and a straight white nose could be seen. They had loved one another three years ago and their love had survived all the privations, hardships, dangers and sufferings. And now neither knew whether the other one's love was still alive. Did Nika still feel towards her—Tania Sablin, the same passionate adoration. She had then been the daughter of a well-known General, a

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rich fiancée, belonging to the best Petersburg society, lovely in her eighteen years . . . Her father had been tortured and shot. Now—she possessed nothing—neither home, nor property, not even a country. She was a beggar, dressed in stolen clothes; and maybe here, abroad, someone would claim her Astrachan fur-coat, her shoes, her underwear and she would be tried. Her youthful body was withered from hunger and typhoid, her beautiful hair had been cropped, and her blood had not the strength to send a rosy flush to her sunken cheeks . . . She was a poor fiancée indeed!

Nika gazing into her shining, loving eyes thought that he was not worthy of her. Yes, he had saved her. Yes, maybe already to-morrow they would be free and in a free country, but Russia was not delivered and to what altar would he lead her, whom he loved above all, and where would he build his nest?

Their hearts throbbed in unison. One and the same hymn of love sounded in their souls, their long-suffering, sorrowing souls harassed by their terrible existence and which, like young horses who, after being chased along rocky mountainroads, have sore backs and bleeding knees, and eyes full of mute suffering; but their souls were still young and thirsted for love and happiness.

The dark sea lay before them. The sadness of the north surrounded them. The supple branches of the willows bent low towards the ground, the rusty grass was damp and joyless, the black rushes rustled dully and in the forest the dark pines moaned and sighed. The late autumn spoke of death and the earth was like a cemetery.

“How lovely it is!” Tania said. “My beloved, how lovely!”

The white ray of a search-light played on the dark sky. It swept over the water, and the waves like a silver funeral-cloth flashed and sparkled beneath it. It touched once more the dark sky, seeming to search something in the shaggy clouds, which were hurrying eastwards, then slipped along the shore, flashed its bright light on the pines intensifying the darkness of the forest. The straight tree-trunks with their rosy-red tops, a grey fence and a low hut stood out distinctly. The ray slipped along the shore and beneath it different objects appeared like visions:

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an old overturned skiff, a two-masted Finnish sailing-boat, the stones, the sand and the low flat, wind-swept grass.

Osetroff, Jelieskin and another tall man in peasant clothes were coming towards them.

They pushed off when the moon had risen and the sea was shimmering and sparkling in its silvery rays. They got into the boat from the shore. The men, having taken off their shoes, paddled through the icy water to the boat, while Nika carried Tania. She was cosy in his strong arms; she felt herself a little child once more and a happy feeling of freedom and safety overwhelmed her. A little Finnish boy was sitting in the boat. He opened out the sail to slanting yard and threw the ropes over the heads of the passengers who had settled at the bottom of the boat. Toropkoff seated himself on the poop and took hold of the tiller.

"Are you ready, gentlemen", he said. "You haven't forgotten anything?"

"Ready", said Osetroff.

"Well, may the Lord help us."

Toropkoff doffed his cap and crossed himself and all the others did the same.

Toropkoff tightened the sail and the boat shuddered. A wave washed under her, then another knocked against her, breaking in thin sprays, sprinkling everybody with the icy drops. A silvery spray twined like a serpent after the stern. The boat shuddered and slipped on to the water, cutting the hissing waves with its prow. The shore was receding rapidly. Only black waves were all around shining like pale diamonds in the moonlight.

Tania sat on Korjikoff's coat at the bottom of the boat. Polejaeff sat down beside her shielding her from the wind and the waves. The young girl nestled closely to him and her small head in the grey shawl dropped on his shoulder.

Over there getting nearer was Finland.

THE END

